THE NEW
SUNDAY EXPRESS

BENGALURU • SUNDAY • MAY 09, 2021 • ₹12.00 • PAGES 24 • LATE CITY EDITION

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TELANGANA GETS NOD TO TEST DRONES FOR VACCINE DELIVERY

The state has to meet the Centre's conditions to begin trials by May-end for delivery beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS)

FASTER DELIVERY, IMPROVED ACCESS STRATEGY

The approval is part of the Centre's strategy to enhance the scope of drone usage in the country to fight the Covid-19 pandemic. On April 30, the state government was permitted to use drones for experimental delivery of shots within the visual line of sight. The ministry said this would serve its dual plan of ensuring faster vaccine delivery and improved healthcare access

WILL HAVE TO SUBMIT REPORT TO CENTRE

- On April 22, the Indian Council for Medical Research was granted conditional exemption for a similar experiment with IIT-Kanpur
- One of the conditions laid down by the Centre mandates that drone operations shall be limited between sunrise and sunset
- After trials, the state will submit a Proof of Concept to the Centre

400 feet

IS THE HEIGHT PERMITTED FOR THE DRONES TO FLY DURING THE TEST RUNS

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

WHAT'S ALLOWED

KARNATAKA
- Getting groceries on foot till 10 am. Food takeaway till 9 pm.
- Standalone bars and liquor stores (6-10 am)
- Milk booths, shops selling essentials (6-10 am). Veg pushcarts
- Home delivery of food, e-commerce, essentials
- Flights and trains. Cabs to and from airport and rail stations
- Pharmacies, fuel stations, banks

TAMIL NADU
Milk supply, courier services, fuel outlets, Amma canteens
- Shops selling essentials (grocery, vegetable, meat, and fish) can function till 12 pm without running AC

KERALA
Essential, emergency travel
- Medical shops. Restaurants (takeaway and delivery)
- Banks on Monday, Wednesday and Friday
- Inter-state travel on e-pass. Weddings & funerals with 20 attendees max

AP
Govt offices (8-11:30 am)
- Essential services
- Unhindered travel for Covid-19 management duties

DELHI, UP, HARYANA, J&K, RAJASTHAN
Essential shops

TELANGANA
Essential shops, Emergency travel
- Marriage and funeral attendance with ceiling

JHARKHAND
Essential shops, select govt & private offices
- Industry, construction, agricultural and mining

CHHATTISGARH
Essential shops, restaurants
- Banks and post offices

BIHAR
Home delivery from 9 am to 9 pm
- Weddings, funerals with ceiling on attendees

PUNJAB
Essential shops, travel with negative report
- Government offices with 50% staff
- Agriculture, grocery, hardware items and liquor till 5 pm on weekdays

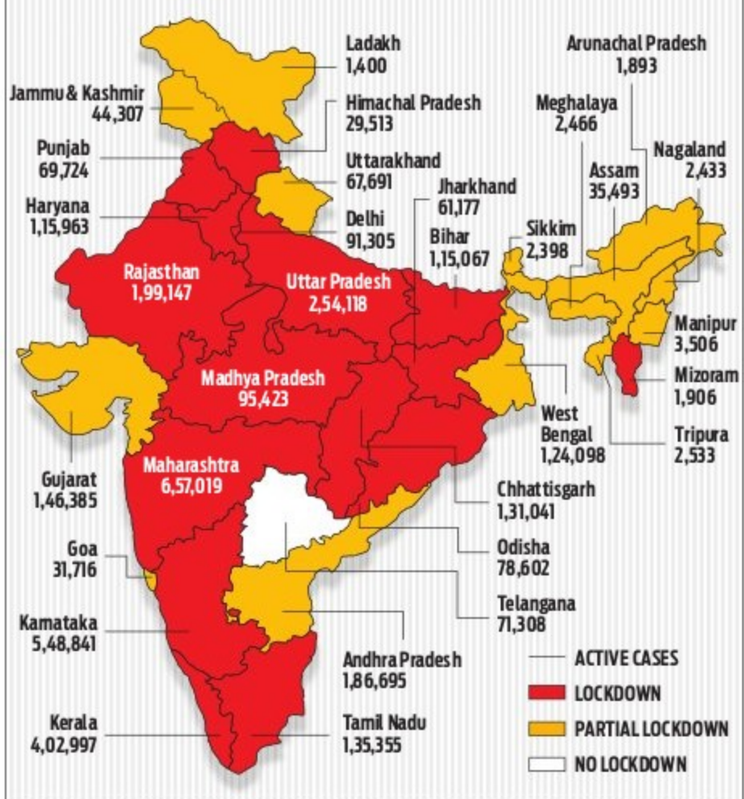
ODISHA
Essential shops till noon on weekdays. Travel of 500 metres from homes
- Weddings and funerals within ceiling

MP
Essential and emergency services. Time window for shops to operate (varying duration)
- Govt offices, industries

EXPRESS MAPS

MOST OF INDIA SHUT DOWN

Map shows level of restrictions and the active case load across states



NO BAR ON ESSENTIALS

Pharmacies, shops selling groceries and vegetables, and takeaway food services are usually allowed in lockdown, though with some restriction on timing. Also, essential services such as telecom, cable TV, media are also allowed to operate as usual (check sidebar for more details)

Top Court forms task force to formulate ways to scientifically allocate oxygen

Team to get six-months tenure, will draw resources from Centre for consultation, work out modalities

KANU SARDA @ New Delhi

THE Supreme Court on Saturday constituted a 12-member national task force to formulate a methodology for scientific allocation of medical oxygen to all states and Union Territories. The order comes in the backdrop of several states complaining about an acute oxygen shortage and blaming the Centre for not providing sufficient quantum.

Initially, the task force would get a six-month tenure, with the Centre nominating two nodal officers, who would arrange logistics, including communication with members, and virtual meetings of the task force.

In the 24-page order, a bench, comprising Justices D Y Chandrachud and M R Shah, said the taskforce shall draw upon the human resources of the Union Government for consultation and information. It would also be free to formulate its modalities and procedures for working. "The rationale for constituting a task force at the national level is to facilitate a public health response to the pandemic based on scientific and specialised knowledge," the order read.

The court said that a consensus had emerged on the need for ensuring allotment of medical oxygen on a scientific, rational and equitable basis and suggested that an expert body of renowned national experts with diverse experience in health institutions be formed.

The Central and state governments shall provide complete and real-time data for facilitating the work of the task force as and when necessary. "All private hospitals and other healthcare institutions shall co-operate with the task force. We expect that the leading experts in the country shall associate with the work of the task force both as members and resource persons. This will facilitate a meeting of minds and the formulation of scientific strategies to deal with an unprecedented human crisis," it said.

DISTRICTS FIGHT IT OUT AS COVID-19 CASES SPIKE ACROSS K'TAKA

K SHIVA KUMAR @ Mysuru

WITH the massive surge in Covid-19 cases, Karnataka, which has 5.49 lakh active infections, is the second-most affected state in the country after Maharashtra, where thousands are battling for life amid an acute shortage of liquid medical oxygen (LMO).

The local administration everywhere is scrambling every day to get enough supplies, leading to oxygen wars between different districts. Even ministers are reaching out to oxygen plants to ensure adequate supplies to the districts they are in charge of.

This has become more accentuated after the deaths of 24 patients at the Chamarajnagar District Hospital due to oxygen shortage. The incident immediately sparked a war of words with Chamarajanagar Deputy Commissioner M R Ravi pointing fingers at Mysuru DC Rohini Sindhuri for 'rationing and restricting' oxygen supply to the neighbouring district. The turn of events compelled the State Government and Karnataka Lokayukta to order separate inquiries into the entire episode.

Over the last three days, oxygen supply to Chamarajanagar district has improved, meeting the requirement of 3.5 kilo litres per day after District In-charge Minister S Suresh Kumar visited the oxygen plants. The situation has come to such a pass that Mysuru-Kodagu MP Prathap Simha has now appealed to the government to fix a quota of oxygen for Mysuru and neighbouring districts to end the tensions and ensure that Mysuru is not blamed for any shortages.

While Mysuru district's estimated requirement is 44-48 metric tons per day, it is supplied 24-28 MTs from four refilling plants.

In neighbouring Mandya district, the daily requirement is 15-17 Kl per day, but it is being supplied with 10-12 kl once in two days. After District In-Charge Minister Narayana Gowda visited some oxygen plants, local MLAs and the MP have raised objection to him taking away cylinders when there are more than 2,000 beds in the district and plans are afoot to increase it to 7,000 oxygenated beds. P5

STATEWIDE	MAY 7	MAY 8
Fresh cases	48,781	47,563
Recoveries	28,623	34,881
Deaths	592	482

Amidst the soaring demand for oxygen across the country, a man carries an empty cylinder to be refilled with the life-saving gas at Peenya in Bengaluru | SHRIRAM BN

State will add 20K more oxygenated beds: DyCM

FROM ACROSS THE STATE

Experts say houses and apartments stocking up oxygen cylinders, preparing for any eventuality

Hubballi district administration forms rapid oxygen supply team to help make the gas available at hospitals

Two Covid Care Centres were opened in Kalaburagi district on Saturday

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

WITH the supply of oxygen to treat Covid-19 patients set to increase from 965 metric tons to 1,200 metric tons after the Supreme Court refused to act on a Karnataka High Court order mandating the quantity, the State Government is now preparing to increase the number of oxygenated beds. Deputy Chief Minister and Covid Task Force Chairman Dr C N Ashwath Narayan said 20,000 oxygenated beds will be added across the state to treat Covid-19 patients.

Measures are being taken immediately to add 10,000 oxygenated beds to overcome the shortage, the DyCM told reporters in Bengaluru on Saturday. Before the outbreak of the pandemic, the oxygen demand was around 100 MT a day which has increased to 965 MT. As the cases are increasing, there is a need to add more oxygenated beds, he pointed out.

The government has decided to have oxygenated beds in Covid Care Centres and depute trained staff at the CCCs.

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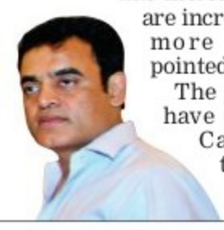


CCB NETS GAS CO STAFFER FOR SELLING O_2 IN BLACK

BENGALURU: Officers of the Central Crime Branch on Friday raided the premises of Siga Gases Pvt Ltd located in the Peenya industrial area here, and arrested the branch in-charge for allegedly selling oxygen cylinders in the black market. The accused, Ravi Kumar (36), had joined the company 10 years ago. Kumar was allegedly charging ₹3,000 for a cylinder of 47-litre capacity, while the government rate for the same is ₹300. P5

IMA roasts Centre for case explosion, lockdown hesitancy

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

HAD the Centre heeded to the experts' advice and gone for a complete lockdown, the country could have been spared the huge uptick in cases, said the Indian Medical Association (IMA) in a strongly-worded statement on Saturday. Calling the Centre's handling of the pandemic "extremely lethargic", the IMA said the Centre's decisions were rarely in sync with the ground realities as it largely ignored the suggestions made by health professionals.

Blaming the Centre for the surge, the IMA said a national lockdown of at least 10-15 days was necessary as it would have given the struggling healthcare infrastructure breathing space to "recoup and replenish both the material and the manpower". It also dismissed individual lockdowns and night curfews by states as ineffective in breaking the chain.

The IMA lashed out at the Health Ministry for not charting out a roadmap for vaccine rollout. It said many centres had suspended the drive due to lack of stock. It was also critical of the Centre's differential pricing system for purchases made by states and private hospitals. Recalling the country's success against smallpox and polio, the IMA said the victory against the dreaded diseases was made possible only through free vaccination.

The medical body also came down heavily on the government for the logistics issues leading to a shortage of medical oxygen despite the country being self-sufficient in production. It also questioned the government data on the number of new cases and mortalities, asking why the actual Covid-19 statistics was not being released. Citing an example of false RT-PCR negative tests, the IMA said that authorities were not adding cases traced through CT scan.

DRDO drug approved

An anti-Covid oral drug developed by the DRDO has been approved by the DCGI for emergency use as an adjunct therapy in moderate to severe cases. Clinical trials of the drug showed it helps in faster recovery and reduces supplemental dependence on oxygen | P7

BIG LOSS

MK KAUSHIK LOSES BATTLE

1980 Olympic gold medallist and former national coach MK Kaushik died on Saturday after battling Covid-19 for the past three weeks. He was 66 and is survived by his son and wife | P11

Hospitalisation norms relaxed

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

IN view of the difficulty being faced by Covid patients in getting timely medical care, the Centre on Saturday removed the requirement for positive test report for hospitalisation in both government and private hospitals.

The move comes after many instances of hospitals turning away even critical patients for want of test reports. The revised policy says no patient will be refused services for any reason.

The Union Health Ministry said admissions must be based on need and that beds can't be occupied by persons who don't need hospitalisation.

The Centre has asked the chief secretaries of all states to issue necessary orders within three days to enforce the new policy.

EXPRESS READ

Indian virus variant found in B'desh, Lanka

Dhaka/Colombo: Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have reported the first cases of the Indian variant of coronavirus, also known as B.1.617, prompting authorities to exercise caution to contain its spread. Both Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are experiencing a surge in the coronavirus cases. In its report, the WHO had said the Indian strain of coronavirus has been found in at least 17 countries.

Not being apprised of situation, WB Guv upset

Kolkata: West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar on Saturday expressed displeasure at not being updated on the law and order situation in the state with regard to post-poll violence by the Chief Secretary and DGP. "Unfortunately both came without any paper or reports sought. Directed them to send the same without delay. In a sense disgusted with such stance," he tweeted.

LOCKDOWN RELIEF

Pharma companies, large factories are now essential services

BALA CHAUHAN @ Bengaluru

THE Department of Commerce & Industries (C&I) has further given exemption to some more industrial establishments to function amid the 14-day lockdown-like restrictions in the State, beginning May 10. They have now been classified as essential services, Additional Chief Secretary, C&I, Dr Rajkumar Khatri said on Saturday.

All units manufacturing drugs, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, medical oxygen, their packing materials, raw material and intermediates will operate.

Food processing units and related industries, cold storage and warehousing services, manufacturing units of essential commodities, production of which requires continuous process, industrial establishments and production units operating with in-situ staff and workers are also allowed to function.

Also, effluent treatment plants, petroleum refineries, large steel plants, sugar mills, rice mills, oil mills, roller flour mills, bakeries and confectionaries, agro-based industries, fish and poultry feed, large cement plants, large foundries, fertilisers and tyre manufacturing plants, automobile industry and vertically integrated large textile units are among those which will remain open throughout the restrictions. All other industries will remain shut during the lockdown.

The government has also permitted marriages that are already scheduled. They have to be "conducted at their respective homes in a low-key manner" with close family members up to 40 people and after securing permission from the BBMP officers or tahsildars in districts, said Principal Secretary, Revenue and Member Secretary, State Executive Committee, N Manjunatha Prasad.

ALMANAC TODAY
Sunday: 09/05/2021 • Year: Plava • Ayana: Uttharayana
Ritu: Vasantha • Masa: Chaitra • Paksha: Krishna • Tithi: Thrayodashi 7.23 pm
Nakshatra: Revathi 5.39 pm • Moon in Mesha Rashi • Rahukaala: 04:30 pm to 06:00 pm
Gulikakala: 03:00 pm to 04:30 pm • Yamaganda: 12:00 pm to 01:30 pm

WEATHER
MIN 23°C | MAX 33°C
FORECAST Afternoon clouds

Sunrise 5.56 am
Sunset 6.36 pm
Moonrise 4.20 am
Moonset 4.48 pm

TOWARDS A BETTER future

A young couple is working with disempowered sections of society, and investing in their health, education & job skills

Mahesh and his wife Madhu with their son Yuvaraj

Mahesh Jadhav receives the National Award from President Ram Nath Kovind

YOUNG VOICES

1. I lost my parents at a very young age and I thought that no one will take care of me. But Mahesh Foundation gives me all the love and care, like my parents would **–Pooja, 14**
2. I came to know that I am HIV-positive and lost all hopes of getting an education. Mahesh Foundation is educating me and helping me to be self-sufficient. I am working and leading a dignified life **–Ramesh, 16**
3. Mahesh Foundation has been taking care of all my needs and wants. I was not sure I would get a proper education when I lost my parents. Mahesh Foundation is helping me achieve my dream **–Pallavi, 18**

(Names of MF inmates changed)

TUSHAR A MAJUKAR @Belagavi

IT WAS the face of a small, helpless four-year-old child, Rupesh, that led to the building of the Mahesh Foundation. Little Rupesh (name changed) was an orphan, suffering from AIDS and in a critical condition. He was undergoing treatment at the district hospital when Mahesh Jadhav chanced on him. It changed his life completely.

That was back in 2008, when Jadhav was just 21 years old. He brought Rupesh home with his mother's permission, though it raised many eyebrows in the area. "The child was in a critical stage and there was no one to help due to the stigma the disease brought. I wanted to help him at any cost and convinced my family that I wanted to bring him home. And this is how the first family member joined Mahesh Foundation," he said.

After meeting Rupesh, Jadhav started finding out more about HIV patients. Five more orphan kids came home, as no one was ready to rent out a house to provide shelter.

Mahesh Foundation (MF) has since been working with one of the most neglected and stigmatised sections of society, People Living with HIV (PLHIV). Since the early days, Jadhav has striven to provide dignity and livelihood to people infected with or affected by HIV. Today, the foundation has many projects that benefit the bottom rung of society, and has brought recognition for Jadhav in the form of the President's Medal in 2017 for his contribution to child welfare. He also received the State Award for the same in 2014.

Jadhav, a diploma holder, aimed to become a software engineer, but ended up with electronics and a transportation business. As he couldn't give sufficient attention to kids at his shelter, he handed over his business to managers and focused totally on the Foundation's activities.

It was the local press that discovered Jadhav and the Mahesh Foundation: it was a feel-good story of a local lad who cared for pariah HIV+ children. He got extensive coverage, and as his foundation became famous, many more such kids were brought to the shelter, with the number quickly rising to 26.

It took a toll, though, of his personal life. Jadhav, who was engaged to marry, found that his fiance's family did not approve and broke the alliance, suspecting that he could be HIV-positive too.

"The stigma associated with HIV probably kills more people than the disease itself," says Jadhav. "This stigma was affecting me and my family. People would look at me strangely, and ask if I or any one of my family members was HIV-positive. After my engagement was broken, I deferred marriage plans."

There were many other hurdles too. Jadhav had enrolled the children in a local government school but in March 2011, the headmaster stopped them from coming to school. "We had to take up a fight with the authorities to reverse the decision and get our kids back into school to write their exams," he said.

Mahesh Foundation started taking up educational programmes, providing school kits to HIV-positive students. Today, nearly 2,000 such children get books, bags, geometry boxes and more, like nutritional supplements. It has also set up a helpline to ensure the kids get medicine on a timely basis to stay healthy, and also offers counseling to keep their spirits up.

The Foundation now has its own premises for HIV-positive and underprivileged children. In 2018, it started a school for underprivileged kids, and provided them skill-based education for free. They, along with children from nearby slums, are educated under the same roof. It also supports the education of over 20,000 underprivileged children externally, providing computer skills, art and craft, etc. Currently, the school has students from Class 1 to 5, and plans to extend to Class 10.

As the Foundation grows, Jadhav is hoping to touch many more lives. It is building a 50-bed charitable hospital for the poor. "With conditions worsening after the Covid-19 pandemic, we plan to provide free healthcare to underprivileged children," said Jadhav.

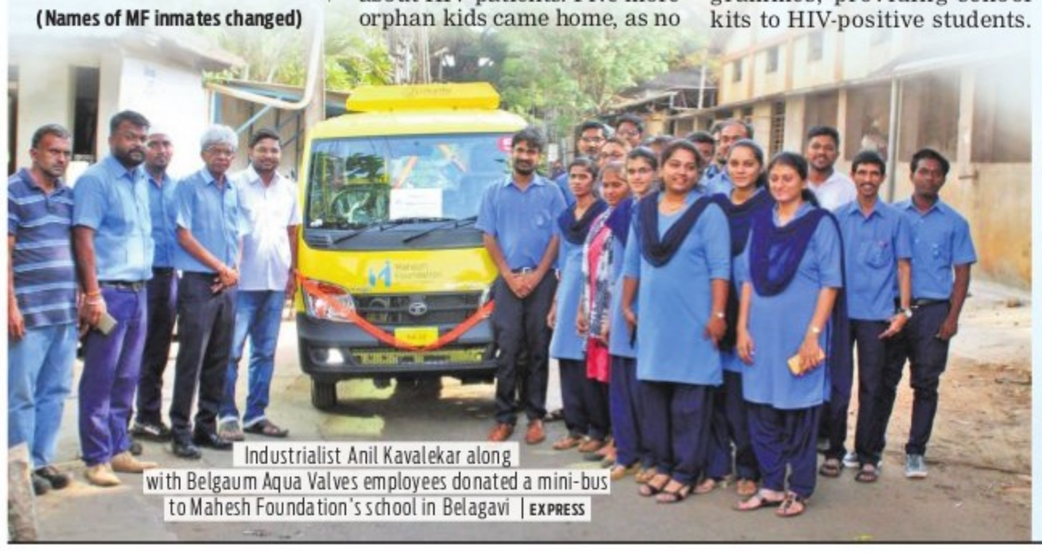
MF also started a Mahila Udyog to manufacture bags. It employs women from slums, especially those who have lost an earning member or are in financial difficulty.

PERFECT PARTNERSHIP

He met his life partner Madhu, a like-minded individual who was working with the Foundation, and is also dedicated to the betterment of society. After marriage, she dedicated herself to Foundation work, and has been taking up projects for betterment of women and the needy. They have a 2-year-old son, Yuvaraj. Madhu says she started working with MF as she was interested in social work, and it was when she came in touch with Jadhav that she realised the gravity of the struggle of the underprivileged. Over the years, Madhu has been focusing on giving voice to the unheard sections of society, especially empowering needy women. "I reached the grassroots level and could understand the challenges faced by women who lost their breadwinners and are facing financial difficulties," she said.

Madhu started Prayatna, an initiative to support such women and other marginalised communities. "Our mission is to support educational and medical needs of vulnerable communities and provide them an opportunity to earn their livelihood. We have extended help to weavers and potters who are suffering due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and have provided a platform to sell their products. The revenue generated is utilised for needy children's education." Prayatna provided sewing machines to women so they can be financially independent and support their families.

In the coming days, Prayatna intends to set up a Livelihood Centre for women.



Industrialist Anil Kavalekar along with Belgaum Aqua Valves employees donated a mini-bus to Mahesh Foundation's school in Belagavi | EXPRESS

An engineer indulges his passion for wheels of yore by buying cult bikes and scooters, and tends to them with love. And takes them for a ride, of course

Motorcycle diaries

VINTAGE WHEELS

Yezdi Deluxe	Lamby Polo
Rajdoot	Hero Majestic (35 cc)
Harley Davidson Street 750	Hero Puch
Vijay Super	Luna Super
Royal Enfield Mofa	Bajaj Priya
	LML Vespa
	Lambretta

Roshan Shetty with his collection of vintage bikes and scooters | EXPRESS

PRAKASH SAMAGA @Udupi

NESTLED amid coastal Karnataka's verdant hills is a house that has become something of a personal historical record of motorbikes available in India, thanks to Roshan Shetty's love for vintage wheels. The 31-year-old civil engineer's house in Athrady, Udupi district, is encircled by gleaming vintage two-wheelers that he has collected since 2015. He has 30 of them now. "I collect them because I feel they are treasures lost in time," says Roshan. His collection includes both the indigenous and the exotic, with each bike known for something unique – either its performance or the nostalgia it evokes.

While pursuing a degree in engineering at Manipal Institute of Technology in Manipal, he became interested in bikes through motorcycle stunt shows. He also used to hang out at his friend's garage, and picked up the workings of different two-wheelers, and nuances of the machinery. It was around this time that he began to dream of collecting vintage two-wheelers.

Roshan got his first treasure in 2015, a Yezdi CL2, a year after he first saw it. Yezdi bikes were hugely popular when they were launched in the 1970s and 80s, and acquired cult status among Indians for their performance and design, but were eventually edged out of the market by newer bikes. He saw a man with the Yezdi CL2 in Udyavara (near Udupi) but couldn't approach him. It was only a year later that he was able to meet the man and managed to convince him to sell them the bike. In 2016, he stumbled across an ad for the sale of a Yezdi Roadking on online marketplace OLX. Ecstatic, he bought the bike from its Bengaluru-based owner and had it delivered to his hometown.

The next year – 2017 – was the year of nostalgia. Roshan acquired a Lambretta scooter – another classic from the 1970s – which for many Indian families was the first motor vehicle they owned and which could easily accommodate a family of four. Many people have memories of standing in the front of the scooter as a small child, not to mention the scooter's depiction in Indian and Hollywood movies of the time. Vintage bikes are neither easy to find, nor easy to procure – nobody wants to part with a vintage machine. "Some of them were almost scrap. I had to contact mechanics from faraway places to get spare parts. I restored them myself," he says with pride.

Roshan's bikes may be lined up outside his house, but they aren't just for show. Two years ago, he went on a road trip with seven others from Udupi to Kerala on his Lambretta. He has also undertaken such trips to Goa, Madikeri, Sakleshpur and other destinations with his group.

"Collecting vintage bikes and going on road trips once in two or three months is a stress-buster for me. I made many friends because of my hobby. As the saying goes: birds of a feather, flock together...," he says.

Initially, Roshan's parents Anand and Rathnavathi Shetty weren't too happy with their son's hobby, which is rather expensive. But gradually, they too began to develop an appreciation for Roshan's wish to own pieces of motorbike history. Besides, he could balance his profession and hobby, and that made them happy. Roshan has 30 vintage bikes, but there are more out there. He is currently looking for a Suvega moped and Rajdoot GTS 175, made famous by Raj Kapoor's 1973 film Bobby. "I will get them too. I am looking for them," he says simply.

For now, as it has been for a while, every Sunday is vintage bike ride day.

Texas Instruments to set up 86 ICU beds

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

TEXAS Instruments on Saturday announced setting up of 86 critical care beds in a modular ICU unit at the Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Chest Diseases in Bengaluru. Given as part of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative, the ICU unit will come up at an investment of Rs 3 crore and will be ready in 3-4 weeks.

The announcement was made after a delegation consisting of Santhosh Kumar, President and MD, Texas Instruments, Rajesh Khush, Director (Corporate Affairs), Gaurav Jabulee, Asia Legal Director and Shetul Thakrar, Director (Finance and Operations), met Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa on Saturday.

Yediyurappa said the government wants to partner with more corporates to enhance health infrastructure in a quick time. "I appreciate and thank Texas Instruments... I appeal to all corporates join hands with Government in this battle against the pandemic," he said.

3rd wave: Nimhans to aid child, women helplines

BALA CHAUHAN @Bengaluru

IN anticipation of a possible third wave of Covid-19 and its perceived impact on children and those not vaccinated, the Union Government has asked the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (Nimhans) to support the two helplines — 1098 for children and 1091 for women -- with mental healthcare professionals.

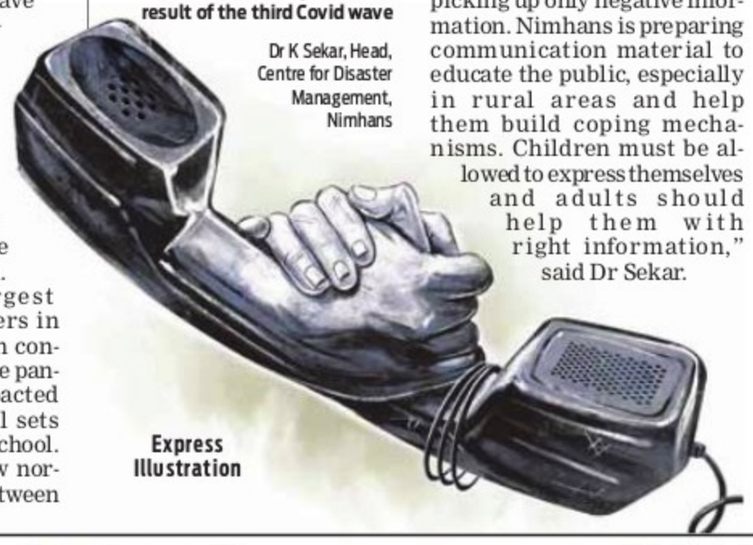
"The Ministry of Women and Child Development has asked Nimhans to help the two helplines with trained mental health professionals who can address the issues of women and children that may arise as a result of the third wave and its impact on children," said Dr K Sekar, Head of Centre for Disaster Management, Nimhans. "We have 40 professional volunteers and have split them into two — tertiary and secondary groups — to handle the two helplines," he added.

India has the largest population of youngsters in the world, with children constituting 10 per cent. "The pandemic has gravely impacted education and the skill sets that children acquire in school. We have to look at a new normal to bring a balance between online and offline education," he said.

Meanwhile, Dr Sekar said the national helpline -- 080-46110007 -- launched by Nimhans in March last year to provide psycho-social help to people in the wake of the pandemic, has received 4,48,458 calls till April this year. "There are 656 mental health professionals from 24 mental health centres of excellence who have been handling the national helpline in 12 languages," said Dr Sekar. He said that 70 per cent of the calls are from Hindi-speaking states and the remaining are from South India and other non-Hindi speaking states.

"Most of the calls are related to worries on isolation and logistic issues. Around 12% of the calls are on child-based issues, disruption in education and livelihood, food and severe financial distress. There are calls related to bereavement and post-traumatic stress and there are calls of burnout by frontline health workers," he added. "There is too much negativity around. People are picking up only negative information. Nimhans is preparing communication material to educate the public, especially in rural areas and help them build coping mechanisms. Children must be allowed to express themselves and adults should help them with right information," said Dr Sekar.

> **The Ministry has asked Nimhans to help the two helplines with mental health professionals to address the issues of women and children that may arise as a result of the third Covid wave**
>
> Dr K Sekar, Head, Centre for Disaster Management, Nimhans



Express Illustration

With 2nd wave, mental stress disorders go up

BOSKY KHANNA @ Bengaluru

IT'S been three months since Bheemappa N, a lecturer at a private college, lost his father to Covid, but he is still unable to cope with the loss. Every night, he relives those days in his sleep, and mutters, "Switch off the ventilator machine, I am unable to sleep. Doctor said only if oxygen level drops, should he be given oxygen. Please help, doctor... he is falling ill."

Bheemappa is not alone in dealing with such traumatic situations. Doctors at Nimhans and psychiatrists across the city confirm that cases of post-traumatic stress disorder are quite common, but they are seeing a significant rise in the number of such cases during the second wave, compared to last year.

Take the case of Sudheer M, who was under treatment for nearly a month. "I can still hear the sound of the ventilator and drips. I get up at night and scream," he said. He says one day he yelled "Doctor, please save me!" at an office meeting.

Dr Pratima Murthy, head of Department of Psychiatry, Nimhans, explained that PTSD is normal and people usually suffer it for six months. But it is important for them to talk it out and keep themselves occupied with some activities. "While last year there was uncertainty, the second wave has created more fear, stress, anxiety and tension. Comparatively, cases have increased."

Doctors at Nimhans said their helplines are getting numerous calls. The government, too, has started a helpline.

It is not just patients and family members who are stressed, but even doctors, a psychiatrist with a private hospital said. "I got a patient, a doctor on Covid duty for one year, who wants to quit his profession. Another doctor rushed into my clinic crying that he was unable to hear the pleas of a patient's family members," he added. Dr K A Sekar, head of disaster management, Nimhans, said that when people grieve, it helps them come to terms with death. "But now, they cannot and this adds to stress. Stress is higher because of the restrictions," he added.

Nodal officers for war rooms

To ensure smooth functioning of Covid war rooms and to iron out problems, if any, the State Government has deputed nodal officers of the rank of KAS to each of them in the eight zones

Name	Zone	Contact #
Shantaraju	East	9845905966
Ranganath	Yelahanka	9886241563
Abhijen	West	9986035230
Anand	South	953870900
Shivanna	RR Nagar	9513513156
Vijaykumar	Bommanahalli	9019740986
Sridhar	Dasarahalli	8123671089
Mahesh Babu	Mahadevapura	9448715244
Khaji Nafisa	Head Office	9980837939

EXPRESS READ

Officials appointed for Covid management

Dr Sahana Hadimani, KAS, special officer, land acquisition, BDA and Nikhita M Chinnaswamy, special officer, land acquisition, have been appointed as nodal authority for the state to issue requisite certifications and authorisations for free of cost import of relief items for Covid-19. The government has appointed Pankaj Kumar Pandey, Secretary, Tourism Department and V Ponnuraj, MD, KPCL, as nodal officers to oversee constitution of Ward DETER committees.

City Police Commissioner Kamal Pant led an enforcement drive around the city on Saturday to take strict action against those venturing outside unnecessarily. Police seized over 3,000 vehicles on Saturdayand sealed 24 shops

'WE NEED TO OVERCOME OUR FEAR TO HELP OTHERS'

SUNDAY INTERVIEW

RAMU PATIL @ Bengaluru

AS the raging Covid pandemic is causing great pain and distress across the country, **BV Srinivas**, president, Indian Youth Congress (IYC), is leading a group of volunteers to venture out to help others. The young politician from Shivamogga district and his team have been delivering oxygen cylinders, medicines and food, and also rushing to hospitals to help needy patients at the national capital. "If one person helps another, we will not have a situation of people dying on the roads without treatment," says the cricketer-turned-politician and the first Kannadiga to become Youth Congress president. Excerpts.

What is Youth Congress doing to help people?
We have a team of 1,000 volunteers, including 600 who had worked during the first wave. Beds, oxygen, medicine and plasma are the main issues that people are facing now. We have different teams handling each of those problems. The team attending to plasma transfusion identifies people who have recovered from Covid and convinces them to donate plasma. We organise medicines and arrange oxygen cylinders to those who are yet to find beds. Our teams help with doctors' consultation, counselling, home isolation, medicine kits and food.

How do people reach you?
People call us over phone, message us on WhatsApp groups and contact us through social media platforms. These requests are handled at state offices. The ones that we get at our Delhi office are sent to respective states. Around two lakh people have reached out to us till now. We may not be able to help everyone, but we have reached out to maximum number of people.

When was the last time the Youth Congress did anything like this? What motivates you to do it now?
This is our party tradition and we have always been doing it. We had done similar work in Uttarakhand during floods, in Bihar, Jammu & Kashmir, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Odisha and many other states. Earlier, our work was confined to one particular state or four or five districts in a state, which was why it was not known in other places. Now, our teams are working across the country. Rahul Gandhi's message to provide all possible help and support to people is a big motivation for us. It is teamwork and not just me alone. Our efforts are fully supported by the party.

How are you managing the resources?
First, we started with whatever we could pool in. Later, the party supported us and also, people extended support after we launched a donation link on our website. It would not have been possible without the support of the public.

Your help to New Zealand embassy employees was dubbed as a publicity stunt...
Indian culture is to help our guests. How can anyone find fault with that? They sent SOS and we helped them. We got a request from their official Twitter handle. It's not the time to do a postmortem of what others are saying. We are focused on helping others and saving lives.

Don't you and your team members feel scared?
Definitely. Everyone feels scared. My mother calls me three times a day. But we need to overcome that fear of stepping out, and help others. A small boy was taking water in his hands and trying to put off a fire that had engulfed a house. A person next to him asked how he can put off the fire as all water is slipping through his fingers by the time he reaches the house. The boy replied that it may or may not be possible for him to put off the fire, but he is making the effort. When this is discussed in the future, his name will be counted among those who tried to do their bit and not those who stood watching it. That's the moral of the story.

Any particular incident that moved you most?
I had gone to LNJP Hospital in Delhi to give medicines to a person and saw 15 ambulances in the queue. In one of those ambulances, I spoke to a patient who was finding it difficult to breathe. I told him that I would come back and help him. But by the time I returned after 25 minutes, he had died. I was devastated. We come across many such situations. Imagine what happens to a person who goes to four or five hospitals but fails to find a bed. We should have been better prepared when we had time. It's a shame that people are dying because of shortage of oxygen. There is no point in talking about politics. Young politicians must understand that irrespective of the government in power, we should help others. It is the responsibility of every citizen, especially youth, to come forward and respond to others' pain. If one person helps another, we will not have a situation of people dying on roads without treatment.

Do you think a nationwide lockdown is needed?
Yes, I think so. We need a lockdown with proper planning. We have to keep aside politics, do what is best for the country and not make it a prestige issue.

Manippady writes to PM, complains against BSY

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Mangaluru

BJP leader and former Chairman of Karnataka State Minorities Commission Anwar Manippady has accused Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa of "suppressing" the Wakf scam report in connivance with Congress leaders, who are accused in the Rs 4 lakh crore scam.

In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP National President JP Nadda and others, Manippady has said: "I was even offered to forego the report for whatever fund I ask for by our leader BS Yediyurappa's own son. It's not lakhs or crores, it's trillions that has been agreed upon by the opposition and our leader Yediyurappa to suppress this report. I challenge BSY to hand over the Wakf scam report and Lokayukta fact-finding report to the CBI. Also, keep the Wakf Board which is the crux of the report, in suspended animation. If he is honest and not involved in this mega scam, he should do the above," he said in the letter.

Further, Manippady has said that Yediyurappa, who was demanding that the then Congress government table the Wakf scam report in the legislature session, did not show any interest in tabling it after he became the CM. Finally, it was only after the complaint reached the Supreme Court that Yediyurappa decided to table it in September 2020. However, Anwar Manippady says it was only a token, and was not tabled in accordance with the Act.

BJP committee discusses pandemic, bypoll results

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru:

THE BJP state core committee meeting was held on Saturday night to discuss the Covid-19 situation and outcome of the recent bypolls in Karnataka, as well as elections in five other states.

At the virtual meeting, attended by Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa, BJP State President Nalin Kumar Kateel and senior leaders including BL Santhosh, the committee discussed the need for better coordination between the party and government, to fight the pandemic.

Sources in the BJP said senior leaders suggested that party leaders should be consulted while taking decisions to contain Covid spread in the state. It has to be a joint effort by the government and party, sources said. They also reportedly suggested formation of task forces at different levels to fight the pandemic.

At the first meeting of the reconstituted core committee, members also discussed Belagavi Lok Sabha, and Maski and Basavakalyan assembly elections. Congress won Maski while BJP managed to win two other seats.

Publish test results within 24 hrs, labs told

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

CURRENTLY, 70,000 beds, including 35,000 in government facilities are reserved for Covid treatment. Of them, 50,000 are oxygenated beds, he said. The government has also decided to shift around 30 per cent of patients in government and private hospitals, who are stable, from oxygenated beds to step-down hospitals, the DyCM said.

He directed laboratories conducting RT-PCR tests to publish results in 24 hours.

Vijayendra says no leadership change

BANSY KALAPPA @ Bengaluru

AS Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Basavaraj Bommai and BJP State Vice-President **B Y Vijayendra** headed to New Delhi on Saturday by a special flight, there was intense speculation about a possible leadership change in Karnataka.

There was a buzz in corridors of power that Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa might just make way for another leader, with some guessing that the central leadership would immediately anoint a successor to Yediyurappa. Party members opposed to Yediyurappa said there is definitely no smoke without fire, but Vijayendra doused all such speculation.

"There is no question of a leadership change. I am in Delhi to sort out some legal issues and will return on Sunday. Some people are talking of a leadership change, but that is not true," he told TNSE. Asked if he had met Union Home Minister Amit Shah, he said it was not part of his itinerary, making it clear that leadership change was not on the cards.

Meanwhile, highly placed sources confirmed what Vijayendra said. "There is no leadership change, how can anyone change the Chief Minister when there is a raging pandemic? The focus is on sorting out Covid issues."

A source within the State government said the duo could be in Delhi to clarify on the Jindal land deal. "There have been murmurs of corruption in this deal and also Covid management, with minister like CP Yogeshwara and other MLAs complaining to the central leadership," the source said. The deal involved the handover of over 3,600 acres of land to Jindal.

There is reportedly a legal issue to be handled, which brought State Advocate-General Prabhuling Navadgi too to Delhi.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public are hereby informed that my client Smt. Nagamma W/o Late Kempegowda .H.C, aged about 52 years, R/a No. 244, 4th 'B' Main Road, 4th stage, 4th Block, Basaveshwaranagar, Bangalore-560079, had lost the two original registered Sale Deeds registered before the office of the Sub-Registrar of Bangalore North Taluk, Bangalore. (1) Documents No. 787/1962-63, dt: 24-4-1962, Book-I, Volume-2152, Pages 196 to 198, in respect of site measuring East to West: 30 feet and North to South: 15 feet and (2) Documents No. 3997/1963-64, dt: 20-8-1963, Book-I, Volume-2312, Pages 243 to 246, in respect of North side half portion of site No. 40, measuring East to West: 30 feet and North to South: 17 feet. Both the sites are situated at Sy. No. 79 of Agrahara Dasarahalli, Yeshwanthapura Hobli, Bangalore North Taluk, presently comes under BBMP Ward No. 105.

She lost the said original Sale Deeds on the way to her house from the Xerox shop at Basaveshwaranagar, Bangalore on 26-04-2021 at about 9:30 am she has reported the same before the Magadi Road PS in writing as well as by way of online E-lost report No. 100260/2021, dt: 4-5-2021 and also obtained endorsement to that respect.

If anybody found the aforesaid original sale deeds, please handover the same to the custody of the undersigned and they will be awarded suitably.

SURESH .L MUGALAKKI, Advocate
No. 61, 1st Floor, Jaimunirao Circle, Agrahara Dasarahalli, Magadi Main Road, Bangalore-560079.
Mob: 9880782409

SOUTHERN RAILWAY
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM DIVISION, ELECTRICAL / WORKS
E-TENDER NOTICE
No.V-EG-OT-01-2021-2022
Dt.07-05-2021

Name of Work:
Sl.No.1. Provision of monumental flag high mast of 30.5m (100ft) at District Head quarters stations viz. Nagercoil, Quilon, Alleppey & Kottayam
Sl.No.2. Manning & "A" checks of 500KVA DG sets available in power cars of Train No.22659/60 (Kochuveli - Dehradun – Kochuveli weekly Exp) in coaching depot Trivandrum of Trivandrum Division for a period of one year.
Sl.No.3. Manning & "A" checks of 500KVA DG sets available in power cars of Train No. 22633/34 (Trivandrum – Nizamudin-Trivandrum) in coaching depot of Trivandrum of Trivandrum Division for a period of one year
Sl.No.4. Manning & "A" checks of 500KVA DG sets available in power cars of Train No.22653/54 (Trivandrum – Nizamudin-Trivandrum) in coaching depot of Trivandrum of Trivandrum Division for a period of one year.
Sl.No.5. Kollam Proposed accommodation of SSE. P Way office and rest room for track machine stall –Electrical arrangement

Value :
Sl.No.1 Rs. 11,75,937/-
Sl.No.2 Rs. 9,76,820/-
Sl.No.3. Rs. 8,60,808/-
Sl.No.4. Rs. 8,79,944/-
Sl.No.5. Rs. 7,77,558/-

Tender closing date & time: 31.05.2021 at 14.00 Hrs
Complete details and tender document will be available at www.ireps.gov.in.
Senior Divisional Electrical Engineer/G
Southern Railway, Trivandrum
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SOUTHERN RAILWAY
SALEM DIVISION
E-TENDER NOTICE
The Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer Electric Loco Shed, Erode. Online tender are invited for the following work:
Tender No: SA/A/RS/ED/OT/21-22/1, Date: 06/05/2021.
Description of Work: Servicing of ELGI make TRC1000 MN, TRC1000 MNUG, compressors of electric locomotives available at Electric Loco Shed, Southern Railway, Salem Division, Erode
All details regarding the tender are available at https://www.ireps.gov.in
Senior Divisional Electrical Engineer
Electric Loco Shed, Erode
Follow us on : twitter.com/@GMSRailway

PUBLIC NOTICE
The General Public at large is hereby notified that, **Sri. SHIVANEGOWDA & OTHERS,** being absolute owners of the under mentioned property, through their registered Power of Attorney Holder **Sri. UMESH K.V.,** are desirous to sell the under mentioned property to my client/s. If any person/(s), including Bank, Financial Institution, Private Financier and all Statutory Authorities, claiming any right, interest, objections or charges on the under mentioned Schedule Property or any part thereof, is/are hereby required to contact me at my Office at **No. D-307, Temple Trees Apartment, Kanakapura Main Road, J.P. Nagar, 6th Phase, Bengaluru-560 078,** with documentary evidence, within **15 (Fifteen)** days from the date of this publication, as otherwise the said sale will be completed without any reference or regard to any such purported claim or interest, which shall be deemed to have been waived for all intents and purposes.

SCHEDULE PROPERTY
ALL THAT PIECE AND PARCEL OF Immovable Agriculture Property bearing **Survey No. 258/20,** [Old Survey No. 258/3], measuring **16 Guntas,** Khatha No. 119, having Assessment of Rs. 0-45, situated at Maralebekuppe Village, Uyaamballi Hobli, Kanakapura Taluk, Ramanagar District. Bounded on East by Land in Survey No. 181, West by Land in Survey No. 258/2, North by Property of Sri. Veeregowda and South by Property of Chikkegowda & Basavegowda.

Sd/- Advocate
Srilatha Dixit
Mob: +919844 640 641
email: srilathadixit@gmail.com

पंजाब नैशनल बैंक punjab national bank
Circle Office, Bengaluru West, No.100, Mosque Road, Pulakeshinagar, Bangalore-560 005. (Ph.080-25808903, Email : cobangalorewest@pnb.co.in)

SPACE REQUIRED FOR OFFICE PREMISES
Punjab National Bank invites offer from interested parties for their office premises on long term basis in prime area having sufficient parking space at the following locations :

1	Bengaluru – Malathhalli	Carpet area 1200.00 Sq.Ft. +/-20%
2	Bengaluru – Near Police Station Yelhanka New Town	
3	Bengaluru – Near Modi Hospital Road, Mahalakshmi Layout	

Offers be made by interested parties for leasing/renting their premise in sealed envelope super scribed with words "**OFFER FOR OFFICE PREMISES AT_____**" containing TWO separate sealed covers **(ONE FOR Technical and SECOND for Financial Bid).** The Bid must be submitted strictly as per prescribed formats and no column should be left blank. The **BID OFFERS** may be deposited at the above mentioned office personally or sent by Registered/Speed post on or before **5.00 PM of 24.05.2021.** The bank reserves the right to accept/ reject any/all **BID OFFERS** without assigning any reason whatsoever. Full details can be obtained from our Office, all PNB branches at Bangalore or can be downloaded from our website **www.pnbindia.in**

Place: Bangalore
Date : 9.5.2021
Circle Head
PNB, Circle Office, Bangalore West.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Public are hereby informed that my client has into a Registered Agreement to Sell for purchase of the immovable property described in the Schedule – I hereunder from its owners **Mr.G.Sampath Kumar, Mr.G.Dorai Raj, Mr.G.Mohan Kumar,** all sons of Son of Late G.Govindaraj and Mrs.G.Bharathi, Wife of Late G.Govindaraj, residing at No.C-1, Planters Cluster, Dinnur Main Road, R.T. Nagar, Bangalore : 560 032 and has entered into a Registered Agreement to Sell for purchase of the immovable property described in the Schedule – II hereunder from its owner **M/s.G.S.K. Enterprises Pvt. Ltd.,** A Company incorporated under the Companies Act, 1956 and having its Registered Office at No.139, 2nd Floor, Guardian House, Infantry Road, Bangalore : 560 001, represented herein by its Managing Director **Mr.Collin R.Timms.**

Any person/s having or claiming any manner of right, title, lien and interest in respect of the Schedule – I and II Properties may intimate the same in writing to the undersigned with documentary evidence in support thereof within fifteen days from the date of publication of this notice, failing which the claims of all such person/s shall be deemed to have been waived or abandoned and my client will proceed with the conveyance as if no valid claims are subsisting against the Schedule properties.

SCHEDULE - I
All that piece and parcel of the Ground and Mezzanine Floor bearing **Municipal Corporation No.189/1, PID No.76-10-189/1** together with 420 Square feet of undivided share, right, title, interest and ownership in the land comprised therein, situated at **Brigade Road,** Civil Station, Corporation New Ward No.111, Old Ward No.76, Bangalore.

SCHEDULE - II
All that piece and parcel of the First, Second, Third and Fourth Floor bearing **Municipal Corporation No.189/1-1, PID No.76-10-189/1-1** together with 420 Square feet of undivided share, right, title, interest and ownership in the land comprised therein, situated at **Brigade Road,** Civil Station, Corporation New Ward No.111, Old Ward No.76, Bangalore and entirely measuring and entirely bounded on the :

EAST BY : Brigade Road;
WEST BY : Common open passage;
NORTH BY : Shop premises No.190;
SOUTH BY : Shop premises No.189;
and measuring on the :
EAST : 14 feet; WEST : 14 feet;
NORTH : 60 feet; SOUTH : 60 feet;
Totally measuring in all 840 Square feet.

NISSAR AHMED, Advocate
No.10, Millers Road, Benson Town, Bangalore : 560 046.
Dated : 09.05.2021 Place : Bangalore

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STAY CALM STAY SAFE

Manage your fear and anxiety during the novel coronavirus outbreak. Effectively use your time at home by doing yoga, meditation, exercise and self-learning. Most importantly, take this opportunity to do all the things you wanted to at home, adhering to COVID protocols all the while.

Stay calm and stay healthy.

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TRACKING COVID-19

SPEED AND RISE OF COVID-19 CASES IN KARNATAKA

47,563 CASES REPORTED TODAY

48,781 CASES REPORTED YESTERDAY

TALLY STANDS AT
TODAY 18,86,448
YESTERDAY 18,38,885

DEATHS
TODAY 482
YESTERDAY 592

DISCHARGES
TODAY 34,881
YESTERDAY 28,623

ACTIVE CASES
TODAY 5,48,841
YESTERDAY 5,36,641

POSITIVITY RATE
TODAY 7.02%
YESTERDAY 6.88%

MORTALITY RATE
TODAY 0.96%
YESTERDAY 0.96%

RECOVERY RATE
TODAY 69.93%
YESTERDAY 69.84%

The first Covid-19 case in Karnataka was reported on March 8, 2020. Since then until May 8, 2021, a total of 18,86,448 cases have been reported in 1 year and 60 days...

1,04,65,941
Number of people vaccinated across the state

VACCINATION DRIVE STATUS

Health care workers 1st dose	6,90,188
Health care workers 2nd dose	4,46,110
Frontline workers 1st dose	4,58,481
Frontline workers 2nd dose	1,76,559
Age 18-45 1st dose	10,000
Age 45-60 1st dose	37,16,196
Age 45-60 2nd dose	4,22,765
Above 60 1st dose	35,88,738
Above 60 2nd dose	9,56,904

DISTRICT-WISE COVID CASES
LAST 24 HOURS

21,534 BENGALURU URBAN
958 BENGALURU RURAL

Bagalakote: 1,563	Chamarajanagara: 691	Dakshina Kannada: 1,513	Hassan: 996	Kolar: 903	Raichuru: 894	Udupi: 1,043
Ballari: 940	Chikkaballapura: 711	Davanagere: 323	Haveri: 169	Koppala: 600	Ramanagara: 407	Uttara Kannada: 1,034
Belagavi: 991	Chikkamagaluru: 356	Dharwad: 965	Kalaburagi: 1,661	Mandya: 1,225	Shivamogga: 547	Vijayapura: 525
Bidar: 311	Chitradurga: 166	Gadag: 341	Kodagu: 765	Mysuru: 2,294	Tumakuru: 2,419	Yadgir: 718

IF PEOPLE NOT CAREFUL, GOVT NOT PREPARED, STATE WILL BE HIT BY WAVES OF PANDEMIC

Experts say it's time to ramp up healthcare logistics, making beds, oxygen, medicines easily available

NIRAD MUDUR @Bengaluru

IN one year and sixty days from March 8, 2020, when Karnataka's first Covid case was registered, over 18 lakh cases have been reported across the state. Countrywide, the figure stands at 2,18,92,676 (almost 2.19 crore). The state – which recorded India's first Covid death – has witnessed 17,804 deaths, even as it moves towards the peak of the second wave, which has been deadlier than the first. We are not done yet as experts are issuing warnings about a third wave, likely to be deadlier than the second. It appears that there is no end to the suffering.

Karnataka is witnessing an explosion of cases and fatalities. It recorded a shocking 592 deaths for a single day on Friday, a jump from the earlier peak of 346 on May 5. But worse may be round the corner.

When the first wave started abating in November last year, the Covid Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) advised the State Government to anticipate a second wave and be ready to manage it better than the first one.

It submitted a document on November 30, titled 'Advisory on Recommendation and Containment Measures for Second Wave of Covid-19 in Karnataka'. It suggested closely monitoring the seven-day average growth rate and viral reproduction number at the district and state level. It advised strengthening of contact tracing, surveillance of influenza-like illness (ILI) and severe acute respiratory infections (SARI) and initiating long-term care facilities.

It even alerted the government to expect the second wave in the first week of January 2021, and asked the administration to maintain clinical facilities at the level of October 2020 — when the first wave was just past its peak — and be ready with adequate number of beds (including oxygen beds), ICUs and ICU-ventilators in government and private hospitals. It advised fortnightly RT-PCR sample pool testing of all teachers, students and staff in educational institutions and anganwadis by sample pooling to avoid formation of Covid clusters.

Family members of a person who succumbed to Covid wait to perform the last rites at Giddenahalli in Tavarekere, Bengaluru, on Saturday | VINOD KUMAR.T

FIRST WAVE (FROM MARCH 8, 2020)
- Highest number of cases: 10,947 on Oct 7, 2020
- Highest positivity rate of 12.54% on Sept 27, 2020
- Lowest positivity rate of 4.84% on March 15, 2021
- Highest recovery rate of 98.06% on Jan 30, 2021
- Lowest recovery rate of 35.29% on July 20, 2020
- High mortality rate of 2.08% on July 19, 2020
- Lowest mortality rate of 1.30% on Jan 31, 2021
- Highest number of active cases: 1,20,929 on Oct 10, 2020

SECOND WAVE (FROM MID-MARCH, 2021)
- Highest number of cases: 50,112 on May 5
- Highest positivity rate of 6.88% on May 7
- Recovery rate falls to 69.84% on May 7
- Mortality rate falls to 0.96% as on May 7
- Highest number of active cases: 5,36,641 on May 7

BIG PICTURE

The highest addition to the Covid tally in a single day was 10,947 on October 7, 2020 when the wave was at its worst. In the second wave, so far, the record has been almost five times that number – 50,112 – on May 5, followed by the second highest (49,058) the very next day and 48,781 on Friday.

In deaths, too, the highest number of fatalities in a day in the first wave was 179 on September 18, 2020; while in the second wave, it was 592 on Friday, followed by 346 on May 5, and 328 on May 6.

In active cases, the first wave saw 1,20,929 as the highest number on October 10, 2020, while the second wave is seeing a high average growth rate of 6.80 per cent in active cases, with the highest of 5,36,641 reached on Friday. The figure is poised to increase further.

Dr Vikram Siddareddy, chairman & managing director, United Hospital, Kalaburagi, says, "In the first wave, Covid was milder and we managed it. But this mutant virus (cause of the second wave) is more aggressive. We cannot predict its behaviour. In 14 days, the number of infected persons has increased over 2.25 times."

The speed in growth of active cases is shocking: Since April 24, the active cases took just four days to go up from two lakh to three lakh; another four days to reach four lakh; and five more days to cross five lakh. And we have still not reached the peak of the second wave!

Dr Anoop Amarnath, Head, Scientific Board and Chairman-Geriatric Medicine, Manipal Hospital and member of the state's Critical Care Support Team, says, "Right now, there is an increase in positivity rate, which is a red flag. An increase in these numbers means possibly higher fatality rate down the line."

Karnataka's positivity rate – number of patients testing positive per 100 tests conducted – has shot up from 4.63% on April 4 to 6.88% on Friday. "This should be tamped down to bring the pandemic under control, or we will continue to see higher numbers. We are seeing patients suffering from mucormycosis (fungal infection) and if this gets aggravated, patients can't cope. We need to closely monitor the patients to bring down deaths," he says.

Dr Amarnath says a stringent "lockdown" alone will not help curb cases. "What is needed right now is ramping up healthcare logistics, making beds, oxygen, medicines and even ICUs easily available. This is the real issue in the second wave. If this pans out well then cases can be curbed," he adds.

Dr Shashikiran Umakanth, Medical Director, Dr TMA Pai Hospital, Udupi, says, "If the second wave reaches the peak by May-end and cases decline, it is good. But if it increases again in the rainy season, it may be a very difficult situation." A pandemic comes in waves. Experts say this is because of viral mutations and people becoming careless when numbers decline, allowing virus variants to take hold, often in deadlier forms.

Experts warn of a third wave some time at the end of the year, although many refrain from predicting when. They are reminding the State Government not to repeat its folly and remain prepared for the next wave. "The pandemic has picked up pace and has taken us all by surprise. The second wave may go down in the coming days, but the third wave is predicted to cause larger damage and we have to be better prepared," says Dr KB Cariappa, Dean, Kodagu Institute of Medical Sciences.

Dr YS Rao, Convenor, Covid cell of Indian Medical Association, Udupi-Karavali, says that firstly, critical facilities like oxygen supply and ICU beds have to be augmented and steady supply ensured. Secondly, stricter restrictions should be implemented to reduce the infection spread.

Dr Farhan Faizal, infectious disease specialist, Kasturba Medical College, Mangaluru, adds, "How it will end, nobody knows. But with vaccines, the number of cases in ICU will reduce. For that we need more vaccines and people should follow Covid-appropriate behaviour."

Inputs from: Iffath Fathima, Vincent D'Souza, Naushad Bijapur, Karthik KK, Ramakrishna Badseshi, Marx Tejaswi, Prija GR, Prakash Samaga and K Velayudham

PANIC BUYING

Afraid of scarcity, people hoarding O_2 cylinders

BOSKY KHANNA @Bengaluru

IT is not just private and government hospitals and Covid Care Centres that are demanding oxygen, but also individuals who are stocking up cylinders at home.

As per government records, the demand for oxygen on Friday was 1,240 MT, but the supply was 900 MT. Of the total demand, 30- 40 per cent was from private hospitals, while 20- 25 per cent was from individuals who wanted to stock oxygen at home.

"Some who want it at home are using it for certified medical purposes like for home nursing. But there are many others who are hoarding cylinders out of fear of stocks running out in the market. They don't even know how to use an oxygen cylinder. We are worried now that there will be serious medical consequences. There is also no record of the individuals who have these cylinders at home and of what quantities. This is also contributing to the present shortage," an official said.

The shortage is also because of the government order that states should not share their oxygen resources. "It has made matters worse. For example, even though Hosur is in Tamil Nadu, oxygen supplies used to come from there as it is close to Bengaluru. But now the supplies have stopped. Similarly, Belagavi used to get supplies from Kolhapur. The problem has aggravated because the supplier who had contracts with big hospitals is based in Palakkad and he has stopped supplies because of the cross-border issues. These large hospitals too are dependent on the government for their supplies now," the official explained.

As there is a big demand for ICUs and oxygenated beds, smaller hospitals too have admitted patients to HDU and ICU, not declaring their oxygen capacity. These hospitals too are in queue demanding cylinders of 40KL capacity.

The demand for oxygen has shot up in the last 10 days. Refillers are sitting idle because they do not have vehicles to get oxygen from manufacturing units. "I am a registered oxygen refiller with a licence. I am unable to get liquid oxygen from manufacturing units as they are asking me to get my vehicles, which I don't have, while nodal officers are asking me to supply. How can I," asked a refiller.

Another official said, "Karnataka should have learnt from Kerala. It studied the second wave and quickly converted all beds into oxygen beds and has over 93 oxygen tankers."

A Covid positive patient being administered medical oxygen in Bengaluru on Saturday | ASHISHKRISHNA HP

2 firms claim to have contract to run CCC

BOSKY KHANNA @Bengaluru

AS if the stress of allocating beds and war room troubles was not enough, there is another worry for citizens and State Government and Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike officials.

Two associations claim to have bagged the contract to manage one of the biggest Covid Care Centres (CCCs) in the city at Koramangala National Games Village.

A few days ago, members of the United Sikh Movement had put out a video, saying they were working with the BBMP to open the CCC at the indoor stadium. BBMP south zone officials conducted a detailed inquiry and found that no permission was granted by the zonal administration and BBMP too had not signed any agreement with the United Sikh Movement.

Moinander Singh from the Movement, however, said that they have the oral permission from the BBMP head office and they are waiting for the final order to start work.

Meanwhile, Vinay Bangalore Chandrashekar from AK Entreprises said they have bagged the contract to manage the NGV centre and other BBMP CCCs too. He said that they are waiting for clearance from the BBMP to start work, but took over the site on March 19. He said they have done housekeeping, laundry, plumbing, catering, medical and data entry works for BBMP in other CCCs and government hospitals.

Tulasi Maddineni, south zone commissioner, clarified to *The New Sunday Express* that they have not given any contract to the United Sikh Movement. She said the facility has not been opened yet as the work on the storm water drain nearby is yet to be completed. She asserted that all facilities belong to the BBMP and the Movement cannot claim NGV CCC.

A child gives her throat samples for RT PCR test in Bengaluru. Following a surge in corona cases, more and more people are coming forward for tests | VINOD KUMAR.T

Discharges hit record high at 34,881

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Bengaluru

THE State recorded the highest single-day discharges at 34,881, taking the total to 1,31,9301. It now stands in the third position in the country on the number of discharges, after Kerala at 14,43,633 and Maharashtra at 43,47,592.

Since May 1, Karnataka has been reporting a high number of discharges. It had 18,341 on May 1, 21,149 on May 2, 20,901 on May 3, 24,714 on May 4, 26,841 on May 5, 18,943 on May 6 and 28,323 on May 7. The state's recovery rate that had fallen to 69.84 per cent from 79.34 on April 25 saw a slight increase on May 8 at 69.93 per cent.

The State recorded 47,563 new Covid-positive cases and 482 deaths, comparatively lesser than Thursday's figures. The total positive cases in the State are 18,86,448 and the toll is 18,286. Active cases continued to remain high at 5,48,841. The positivity rate was 30.28 per cent. Bengaluru Urban recorded 21,534 new cases and 285 deaths. Bengaluru's total number of cases stands at 9,29,996. The city recorded 18,473 discharges, taking the total to 5,77,465. Active cases here are the highest among districts at 3,44,754.

On the number of new cases, Bengaluru was followed by Tumakuru at 2,419 cases, Mysuru at 2,294, Bagalkot at 1,563, Dakshin Kannada at 1,513, Kalaburagi at 1,661 and Mandya at 1,225.

CRUCIAL DEVICE

Specialised mask can save oxygen, but in short supply

AJITH M S @Mysuru

AS the state faces an acute shortage of oxygen and districts squabble with each other over its allocation, hospitals in Mysuru are not being given a crucial device that can save at least 30 per cent of valuable medical oxygen. Non-rebreather (NRB) masks are used among patients on oxygen. But even government hospitals are not being given the device, citing a shortage.

Hospitals across Mysuru district are facing a severe shortage of oxygen, and also, this week, 24 people died at Chamarajanagar District Hospital because of lack of oxygen.

Medical experts explained that unlike the more commonly used venturi mask, this device has a plastic bag from where a patient inhales the oxygen. When he exhales, a single-way valve in the mask releases the exhaled air, while oxygen in the plastic bag is untouched, preventing its wastage. "In the venturi mask, there is a continuous flow of medical oxygen and some of it goes waste when a patient exhales. With the NRB mask, this can be avoided as the precious medical oxygen stays inside the plastic bag," said a government doctor. Despite the advantage, they are not able to use them as there is no proper supply, he added.

"The NRB mask can help conserve at least 30 per cent of medical oxygen even in oxygenated, high-flow nasal oxygenated and ICU beds where oxygen requirement per patient can go up to 50 litres per minute," said another senior government doctor.

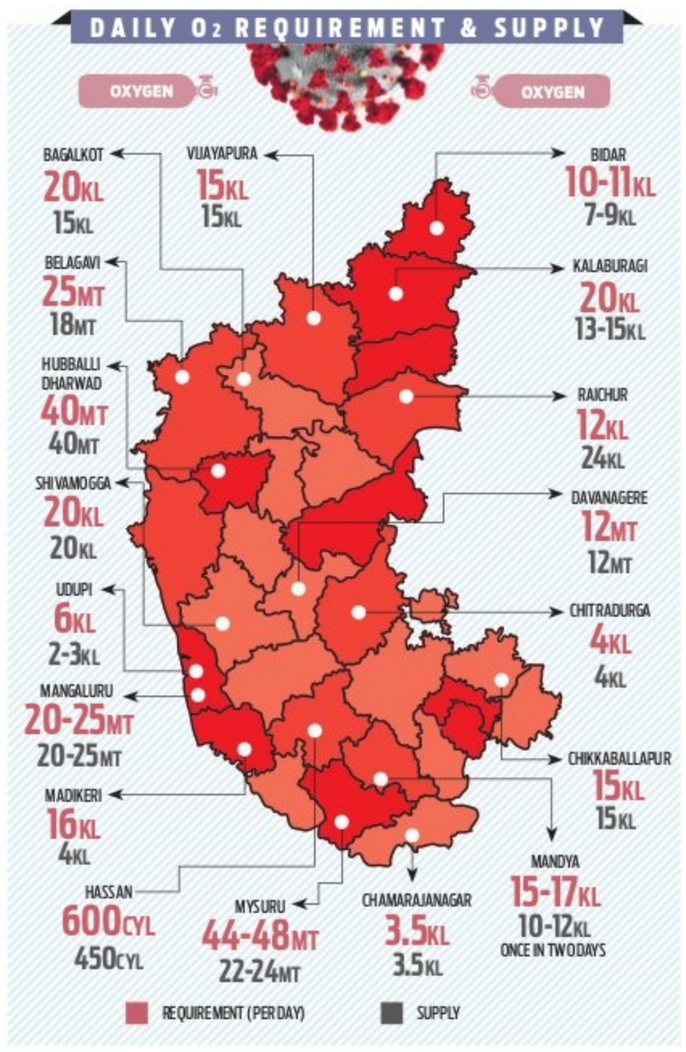
They said that with a large number of Covid patients in need of oxygen, this mask can make a big difference. According to estimates, the busy KR Hospital in Mysuru alone needs 500 such masks every day.

"NRB masks are necessary under the present situation. It could conserve oxygen, but they say there is an acute shortage. Now, our aim is to save as many lives as possible, so there is no option but to use venturi masks," said a doctor.

Private hospital doctors too said that they are facing a similar situation. Government hospitals are requesting people to donate RNB masks, even if in limited numbers, to use them in HFNO and ventilator beds.

Officials who procure equipment for government hospitals, on condition of anonymity, said that they are not getting RNB masks as there is a spike in Covid cases across the country.

Malayalam poet K Satchidanandan has been temporarily blocked from Facebook for sharing a social media post criticising Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah



14-day complete lockdown in TN from tomorrow

All shops, establishments will be allowed to function on Saturday and Sunday between 6am and 9pm

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Chennai

INTENSIFYING measures, gradually, Chief Minister MK Stalin on Saturday announced a complete lockdown for two weeks beginning on May 10. In a statement, Stalin said during the lockdown period, State government offices will not function, except essential services such as secretariat, health, revenue, disaster management, police, home guard, fire and rescue services, prisons department, district administration, electricity, drinking water supply treasuries etc. The heads of the essential departments should make arrangements for the transportation of employees.

The restriction will apply to Central government offices too.

To help the public prepare for the lockdown, all shops and establishments will be allowed to function on Saturday and Sunday between 6am and 9pm.

The Chief Minister also announced that all TASMAC shops would remain closed during the full lockdown period while only take-away services would be allowed at restaurants/hotels/mess and tea shops. Tea shops can function only till 12 noon. Recreation clubs, bars, auditoriums, entertainment/amusement parks, and meeting halls will not function. Restrictions on international flight service will continue (except for the routes allowed by the Union Home Ministry).

Later, in a televised speech, the Chief Minister made a fervent plea to the people to adhere to the guidelines issued for preventing the spread of this infection.

Admitting that the lockdown would affect the livelihood of the people, he reasoned that without a complete lockdown, containing the infection would be difficult. Giving a detailed account on how the spread of Corona infection is surging ahead in many States, the Chief Minister, in his statement, said in Tamil Nadu, the number of new cases per day has gone above 10 percent in more than 23 districts.

As on May 7, the positivity rate in the State stood at 1.35 percent. The decision to enforce full lockdown has been taken based on the views expressed by health experts as well as the district collectors during the high-level meeting held on Friday.

Migrant labourers from Andhra Pradesh board a truck in an attempt to reach their homes before the lockdown comes into effect in Tamil Nadu | SHIBA PRASAD SAHU

War room to monitor beds, ambulances

EXTRAORDINARY situations call for extraordinary measures. Tamil Nadu government has set up a Covid-19 war room, that will monitor the available number of beds, ambulance services, and oxygen supply availability. Chief Minister MK Stalin on May 5 had informed the officials to take measures to this effect. Medical and Family Welfare Minister Ma Subramanian, who inspected the war room at the Directorate of Public Health headquarters, said that it will act as a nodal point and as a command centre for managing bed availability at both government and private hospitals, especially for critically-ill patients requiring oxygen. **ENS**

From Kalaburagi to Kodagu, O2 scarcity haunts K'taka districts

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

IN Madikeri, the designated Covid-19 hospital, which is equipped with a 13-kilo litre oxygen unit, gets only 6 kL every day from a private firm in Ballari. While beds are available, there is a dearth of oxygen cylinders and less than 50 individual oxygen cylinders are currently available in Kodagu. Deputy Commissioner Charulata Somal said that a proposal for 900 oxygen cylinders has been sent to the state.

The medical oxygen shortage, which was witnessed a couple of days ago in Davanagere, as 8.5 kl was being sent to Mangaluru and Udupi, has now stabilised. Regular supply of 6 Kl is being met by Southern Gases in Harihar and Jindal Steel Works in Vijayanagar. The situation was such that Davanagere District In-charge Minister BA Basavaraj had directed the authorities to stop supply to other districts.

While Hassan district requires 600 oxygen cylinders per day, it is getting 400 cylinders. Deputy Commissioner R Girish said the district is currently getting 450 cylinders and they are managing the shortfall by purchasing oxygen from different agencies. The district administration also has stopped supply of oxygen to neighbouring Chikkamagaluru district due to rising number of cases in Hassan.

On Saturday, Udupi district had 900 litres of liquid oxygen at the district government hospital and the authorities have sent reminders to the suppliers as only 2,000 litres was supplied against a requirement of 6,000 litres. The hospital is pinning its hopes on the buffer stock of 40 jumbo cylinders as wait for the arrival of the oxygen, said District Surgeon Madhusudhan Nayak.

However, Dakshina Kannada district seems to be breathing easy with oxygen plants in six medical colleges. According to Binoy Nambiyar, nodal officer for medical oxygen in the district, the requirement is 22-25 tons a day and at least half of it is met by the LMO plants of the hospitals.

Recently, the district received 40 metric tons of oxygen from Bahrain out of which 20 metric tons is provided to Dakshina Kannada. But the worry is the ensuing monsoon when road connectivity to the coastal region gets affected, hitting the supply of goods.

"Kalaburagi district is also facing a shortage with only 13 Kl being supplied from Ballari against the requirement of 20 Kl per day. "We have also requested supplies from oxygen-producing units in Mumbai and Hyderabad and 12 concentrators will arrive in Kalaburagi on Monday," said Kalaburagi District Minister Murugesh Nirani.

Bidar is also facing the heat with only 3 kl oxygen supply per day whereas Raichur has 24 kl stock as against the demand of 12 Kl.

Kalaburagi district is also facing a shortage with only 13 Kl being supplied from Ballari against the requirement of 20 Kl per day. "We have requested supplies from oxygen-producing units in Mumbai and Hyderabad and 12 concentrators will arrive in Kalaburagi on Monday

Murugesh Nirani, Kalaburagi District Minister

In the Covid hospitals in Dharwad district, the demand for oxygen has doubled from 20 tons to 40 tons per day following the increase in Covid cases.

Industries Minister Jagadish Shettar, representing Hubballi-Daharwad, ensured supply of 70 tons of oxygen as the twin cities have three oxygen storage units. Meanwhile, four Pressure Swing Absorption (PSA) oxygen plants will come up in Hubballi-Dharwad to meet the demand.

Belagavi district is being supplied only 18 tons as against a requirement of 25 tons per day. The scarcity has led to a ban on oxygen supply to social organisations. Private hospitals which have a large number of Covid19 patients have also been affected.

The demand in Bagalkot district is 20 MT but the district is supplied with only 15 MT of oxygen, forcing the authorities to depend on oxygen cylinders. However, in Vijayapura the demand of 15 kl of oxygen daily is being met.

In Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa's home district Shivamogga, Vivesvaraya Iron and Steel Ltd is supplying a steady 20 kl to McGann District Hospital and 13 private hospitals. Chikkamagalur district, which requires 2,800 Kl oxygen per day, is getting 3,000 Kl.

Kolar and Chikkaballapur districts are better off as the demand for 10 MT per day each in both the districts is being met from industrial areas in Malur, Mahadevapura and Dobbspet and their proximity to Bengaluru has largely helped.

(With inputs from Belagavi, Shivamogga, Mangaluru, Udupi, Hubballi and Kalaburagi bureaus)

A MOTHER'S LOVE

A mother myna bird feed its young ones on a tree at Pongumoodu in Thiruvananthapuram. The world will observe Mother's Day on Sunday | VINCENT PULICKAL

Fire breaks out on INS Vikramaditya

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Karwar

A fire broke out onboard aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya on Saturday. It was put out in the nick of time by alert naval personnel.

The incident occurred early during the day when one of the personnel saw smoke coming out of the accommodation area for sailors .

The personnel were alerted and the fire, which was minor, was put out immediately.

Neither life nor property has been damaged.

A release from the Indian Navy confirmed the incident and stated that all personnel onboard have been accounted for. "An inquiry has been ordered into the incident," the release said.

INS Vikramaditya is the largest aircraft carrier with the Indian Navy, with an overall length of 284m. It is also considered the largest warship of the Indian Navy. It was commissioned in November 2013 after it completed its sea trials in July the same year.

INS Vikramaditya is the largest aircraft carrier with the Indian Navy, with an overall length of 284m

CCB nabs manager for selling oxygen cylinders illegally

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

CENTRAL Crime Branch sleuths on Friday raided the premises of Siga Gases Private Limited in Peenya Industrial Area and arrested the 36-year-old branch incharge for allegedly selling oxygen cylinders on the black market. The accused, **Ravi Kumar**, is a resident of Peenya. He had joined the company 10 years ago.

A senior police officer said that based on a tip-off, a CCB sleuth in mufti, approached Kumar seeking two gas cylinders and caught him red-handed when he tried to hand them the order after demanding Rs 6,000. Kumar was allegedly charging Rs 3,000 for a 47 litre cylinder, whereas the government rate for the same is just Rs 300.

He had sold several cylinders for Rs 2,000 each in this manner last week. When the demand for cylinders rose, he inflated the price by Rs 1,000 more to make a quick buck. He had also approached some of his friends to sell cylinders, offering them a commission of Rs 500 each, if they provided any contacts.

Kumar has been booked for cheating, under the Drug Control Act and Essential Commodities Act, and police have also seized his bank account to check his transaction details.

ILLEGAL SALE OF REMDESIVIR: THREE ARRESTED

The Drug Control Department on Friday caught the owner, manager and pharmacist of a private hospital for allegedly trying to sell Remdesivir injections in black. Based on a complaint filed by Harish V R, drug inspector of the state intelligence unit of the Drug Control Department, Cottonpet police nabbed Dr Anupama (owner), Doddanna Goudappagol (pharmacist) and Mohan Kumar (manager). They were caught when they charged a customer Rs 5,750 each for three vials of Remdec (Remdesivir). The maximum selling price for a single vial is Rs 899 as fixed by the government, but they were selling it in black to make a huge profit, Harish stated in his complaint.

BAR COUNCIL TO HELP COVID-POSITIVE ADVOCATES FINANCIALLY

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

THE Karnataka State Bar Council (KSBC) has decided to provide financial assistance of ₹10,000 to each advocate who has tested positive for Covid-19 and is in home quarantine. Similarly, it has decided to provide ₹25,000 to each advocate who has been hospitalised owing to Covid-19, stated a release by KSBC chairman L Srinivasa Babu. "I assure to all the advocates and their family that maximum assistance will be given by KSBC during the pandemic," he said.

He also said that KSBC has succeeded in convincing the Chief Justice to direct the State Government to nominate nodal officers in each taluk and district headquarters to look after the advocates and their family. Meanwhile, the government has issued a notification appointing Additional Deputy Commissioners of districts as the nodal officers.

Advocates Association of Bangalore had requested the Chief Justice to direct the State Government to appoint nodal officers and KSBC to give an assistance of Rs1 lakh to Covid-positive advocates. AAB president A P Ranganath said that they held a virtual meeting with ADCs of Bengaluru Urban and Rural districts, Advocate General and judicial officers on Saturday, subsequent to the notification issued by the government appointing nodal officers.

CANNOT DIRECT STATE TO CONDUCT AUTOPSIES ON BODIES OF COVID VICTIMS: KARNATAKA HC

BENGALURU: The Karnataka High Court declined to grant a request made by a petitioner to issue directions to the state government to conduct autopsies on the bodies of each person who allegedly died due to Covid-19. ?"We do not think that at this stage, we can issue a direction to the state government to undertake the autopsies of each and every person who has allegedly died due to Covid-19," a division bench of Chief Justice Abhay Shreeniwas Oka and Justice Aravind Kumar said. ?The petitioner, K M Sreenivasamurthy, an advocate from Chamarajanagar, also asked the court to direct the state to pay ex-gratia compensation to the families of victims of the Chamarajanagar tragedy. The court responded stating that this request would have to be kept pending till the preliminary report of inquiry is placed on record either by the state government appointed officer or the panel appointed by the Legal Services Authority. **ENSw**

EXPRESS READ

10 die as gelatin sticks explode at quarry

Kadapa: Ten persons died when gelatine sticks exploded at a limestone quarry in Tirumala Konda in Kalasapadu mandal on Friday morning while they were being unloaded from a Bolero. The intensity of the blast was such that all the 10 persons were blown to smithereens and the body parts were strewn all over the place at the site. However, Kadapa SP KKN Anburajan, who visited the blast site, said six persons died on the spot and four went missing. According to Kalasapadu police, C Nageswar Reddy, a YSRC leader from Chenchaiahgari Palle in Brahmamgari Matam mandal has been operating the limestone quarry.

Bed-blocking scam: CCB sleuths visit 16 hospitals

Bengaluru : A special team of CCB sleuths visited 16 hospitals across the city on Saturday and gathered more details in connection with the probe into the alleged bed-blocking scam. A police officer said these hospitals were roped in using the BBMP bed management system and related data has been collected. Police checked the details of patients who were admitted, their proof of identity and video footage from the hospital premises. CCB officials questioned 18 staffers of BBMP war rooms, including doctors and helpline workers. The police found that more people, including the aides of local politicians, were involved in the scam. "They will be arrested soon," police said.

Stopped for not wearing mask, student assaults ASI

Bengaluru: Vidyaranyapura police on Friday arrested a 26-year-old final year MTech student on the charge of assaulting an assistant sub-inspector when the former was stopped for not wearing a mask. The accused has been identified as Akshay M. According to the police, ASI Prahalad stopped Akshay who was riding a bike without wearing a mask on Friday. Akshay allegedly started to argue with the ASI and pushed him. When the ASI called the Hoysala police, Akshay allegedly assaulted him and tried to escape. The Hoysala police, however, reached the spot and took Akshay into custody. He has been booked for assaulting on-duty public servant and violating Covid norms and remanded in judicial custody.

KERALA WATER AUTHORITY
E-Tender Notice
Tender No : 05/2021-2022/KWA/PHC/TVLA. JJM 2020-21 - Ranni - Perunadu Gramapanchayath - providing FHTCs from ongoing schemes phase III - part II. EMD : Rs. 200000. Tender fee : Rs. 11200. Last Date for submitting Tender : 07-06-2021 02:00:pm. Phone : 0469-2600162. Website : **www.kwa.kerala.gov.in, www.etenders.kerala.gov.in**.
KWA-JB-GL-6-101-2021-22
Superintending Engineer
PH Circle, Pathanamthitta

DEPARTMENT OF STAMPS AND REGISTRATION
Office of The Inspector General of Registration and Commissioner of Stamps, Kandaya Bhavan, 8th Floor, KG Road, Bengaluru - 560009 Tel: 080-22220436, e-mail: aigrcomp@karnataka.gov.in
No. Comp(1)-64/2017-18 Date: 07-05-2021
TENDER NOTIFICATION
Tenders are invited by the Department of Stamps and Registration for **Selection of a Consulting firm for providing Services for Project Management Unit.** The tenders forms, terms and conditions may be obtained through e-tender procurement. The last date for submitting completed tender forms is **06-06-2021 till 5.00 PM**. For further details please contact **Assistant Inspector General of Registration (Computers)**
Sd/- Inspector General of Registration and Commissioner of Stamps, Bengaluru
DIPR/DDU/YC/348/2021-22
COVID-19. DO NOT PANIC, BE AWARE
Wear Mask | 6 Feet Follow Physical Distancing | Maintain Hand Hygiene

"Everyone has a side to them that's kind of unexplained and feels misunderstood" — Kirk Hammett

WHATABOUTERY IN THE REPUBLIC OF GRIEF

THE THIRD EYE

SHANKKAR AIYAR
Author of The Gated Republic, Aadhaar: A Biometric History of India's 12 Digit Revolution, and Accidental India
shankkar.aiyar@gmail.com

GRIEF hangs heavy in the air afflicted by death, distress, despair and depression. A flailing state left its people helpless. Pleas to save a life compete for attention with intimations of death in social and personal spaces. The eloquence of heartache is binding strangers in an uncommon intimacy of sorrow.

Desolation comes wrapped in haunting images – of the wife desperately trying to revive the husband in an autorickshaw in Agra, the grandson driving with his dead granny in the car struggling to find a crematorium, of the daughter who couldn't get an ICU for her mother appealing for legalising of mercy killing.

Memories jostle for attention of friends and families as they recall the last conversation, stare at numbers from the contact list which won't flash on the screen again. As the writer Joan Didion observed, "When we mourn our losses we also mourn, for better or for worse, ourselves… as we were, as we are no longer, as we will one day not be at all."

Despair has overtaken hope – this is verily the republic of grief. The spirals of smoke from pyres wafting across geographies have left the nation gripped by nauseous inadequacy. That lives were lost will weigh heavily. What will and what must haunt a people is the brutal, inhuman manner of the loss, left breathless by feckless politics and a system submerged in apathy.

Aggravating angst is the parade of utterances. A cabinet minister said, "We on't stop elections in a democracy". Must the process endanger the voters? Of course, elections have been paused midcourse – the 1991 parliamentary polls were paused. Indeed, Section 153 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 expressly states, "It shall be competent for the Election Commission for reasons which it considers sufficient, to extend the time for the completion of any election…"

Grief demands closure on questions – on the why and who which led to the hapless circumstance. Tragically, the questions are drowned in a din of Whataboutery – and answers stranded between claims which cannot be validated and charges which are not refuted.

India and the world have been told nobody saw the surge coming – that no epidemiologist or study predicted the magnitude of the surge. Arguably, nobody predicted the scale – over 275 cases a minute and three deaths every minute.

Critically, the question is who or which study informed the chant of victory over the pandemic – principally the claim of the health minister about the "end-game".

Fact is the case curve was moving upwards from mid-February and, indeed, the principal scientific adviser said, "we saw signs of a next surge but the scale and intensity of it was not clear". There has also been speculation and reports that the Covid task force did not meet for months – and these were not refuted with any credibility.

The troll brigade has breathlessly panted that other countries – the United States and the United Kingdom – did worse in terms of per million cases and ratio of fatalities. That is true. But must the measure how well a nation does depend on how poorly another did – does pride rest on the embarrassing failures of others? Some others held forth that polls were decoupled from the pandemic.

The unravelling of the surge hopefully will wake them from the delusion. At the other end of the spectrum of the Whataboutery is the troll brigade of the Opposition – particularly the Congress which is amplifying its irrelevance by a curious addiction to distracting discourse. Sure there is centralisation of policy and funding. Does that excuse states from doing what was needed to be done when the curve was flattening in December and January?

At the end of 2020-21, states were sitting on cash of over Rs 3 lakh crore. Did the states use the resources to beef up capacity? The second wave is affecting rural India. Take the state of public health centres. In 2019, India needed 1.89 lakh sub centres of which only 1.57 lakh were in place – the largest gap typically is in the poorer states of UP, Bihar, Bengal and Jharkhand. The per capita spend on health of states is abysmal – at ₹1,250 in Bihar or ₹1,602 in UP would be barely enough to cover two shots of the vaccine and maybe an RT-PCR test!

There is no disputing the attention deficit at the Centre. Take vaccine procurement. What was the basis or advice which dictated the quantity of the first tranche and the pause till April 28? Yes for seven decades health care has been neglected. But that does not take away from the paucity of allocation or execution since 2014. The 2016-17 Budget promised to devolve funds to panchayats for sustainable development. The 2017-18 Budget promised transformation of 1.5 lakh sub centres. The programme of Aspirational Districts aimed at improving health outcomes. Yet in April 2021 the work of Rajendra Bharud at Nandurbar is a stand-alone success story.

Typically, the quest in India for accountability ends in the ghetto of ricocheting rhetoric. The seductive temptation to personalise success or individualise solutions frequently institutionalises systemic failure. India which accounts for a sixth of humanity cannot afford the messy status quo. It can and must do better!

'DIDI-O-DIDI' HAS REVERSE EFFECTS TOO

POINT OF VIEW

T J S GEORGE

HOME Minister Amit Shah was bent on winning Bengal this time. He not only held rallies there, but also used Central government agencies to strengthen his party's position. Even the Election Commission attracted criticism the way things panned out. In the end of course, his efforts came to nothing. Mamata Banerjee retained power with two-thirds majority, proving yet again that Bengali hearts were with her, and only with her.

This time, she was also actively helped by Narendra Modi. Usually Modi oratory impresses crowds. In Bengal, however, his tactics proved counter-productive mainly because his tone and phraseology suggested that he was mocking Bengali sentiments. The way he chanted 'Didi-o-Didi' probably was good theatrics as he delivered the speeches. But the phrase and his style of repeating it had contrarian effects. Certainly, Bengalis were not amused.

Ever outspoken, Trinamool leader Mahua Moitra used the Bengali phrase '*rock-er chhele'* to underline Modi's tactical mistake. The term means street-side loafers sitting on a wall and teasing passing ladies. A headline in The Telegraph summed it up neatly. Spread across five columns, it read: "Looks like PM, speaks 'comment mara' boy." The general public also seemed unimpressed by Modi taking things down to street level. A typical comment was: "Covid case 1.15 lakh a day. In Chhattisgarh 22 jawans martyred. Meanwhile Modi: Dido-o-Didi."

To BJP's Bengal chief Dilip Ghosh belongs the credit for the most stupid remark of the season. He had seen Mamata Banerjee limping with a bandaged foot after a car door had slammed against her leg with sufficient force to injure a bone. Referring to that, Ghosh told her to wear Bermuda shorts if she wanted "to show her legs." Such uncivilised minds somehow go up the ladder in the BJP, harming the party without its leaders realising it.

The adverse impact of the Bermuda comment was immediately visible for those who had eyes to see. Women's rights activists took objection and recalled similar remarks by Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat two months earlier. He had targeted girls wearing ripped jeans which, he said, set a bad example to others. Some BJP activists themselves objected to Ghosh's "toxic masculinity". One social worker said: "These leaders never take the gender factor into account. The Bermuda comment impacted urban women. But the tone of Didi-o-Didi violated the progressive spirit of Bengal." Even RSS leaders said they did not support such comments. One was frank enough to say that the "party paid the price for such comments".

In Bengal, the party paid the price for ignoring regional sentiments, too. It's all very well to talk about the unifying appeal of religion and how Hindutva would bring all under one roof of faith. But in life things don't work out that smoothly. As sociologist Prasanta Roy put it: Not all Hindus could fit into one lot, much as BJP might have strategised. "There is a degree of Hinduness in each one of us. A section is rational and calculative. They take an informed decision."

The lesson to learn here is that the local aspirations of people in their limited localities cannot be ignored for the sake of a larger viewpoint that looks at the country and the world from an ideological angle

Politics in India has put one reality beyond challenge. That reality is: There are emotional pulls that override ideological commitments. Neither the BJP nor the Congress has made an impact in Tamil Nadu because "Tamilness" is the predominant emotion there. M K Stalin got crowned because his calling card is Dravida and nothing else. In Dravida South, Aryan BJP will always remain an outsider. That is why the BJP is virtually non-existent in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. Karnataka stands out as an exception for the time being because the state has no Congress or Leftist leader who commands across-the-board respect.

The lesson to learn here is that the local aspirations of people in their limited localities cannot be ignored for the sake of a larger viewpoint that looks at the country and the world from an ideological angle. Ideology could be put above individuals in Stalin's Russia and Mao Zedong's China. And we know what happened to that Russia and that China. Individual lives matter and so do individual aspiration.

Only when the state takes these into account will it progress. Because the state is not an abstract entity as in the textbooks; it is a living entity where every citizen has a stake. And every citizen in every ideology is driven by emotions and aspirations that are fundamentally human. Self-respect, some comforts, family ties, a sense of safety — these are the basic human needs whether we are Indians or Japanese or Anglo-Saxons or Polynesians. Whoever makes these possible wins.

POLL PANEL NEEDS RADICAL REFORMS

OPINION

KALEESWARAM RAJ
Lawyer, Supreme Court
kaleeswaramraj@gmail.com

LAST Thursday, a Supreme Court Bench consisting of Justices D Y Chandrachud and M R Shah delivered a significant judgment. The court considered the plea by the Election Commission that sought to expunge certain oral observations of the Madras High Court against it.

The Madras High Court, while considering COVID-19 related case, said that the EC was singularly liable for the second wave of pandemic by failing to regulate the crowds during the election and should probably face murder charges. The media reported these observations. The EC was aggrieved by these oral strictures and the media reports about them.

The Supreme Court rightly rejected the plea by holding that the institutions such as the EC are not immune from criticism. "Our public constitutional institutions must find better responses than to complain," the court said. It also said that freedom of speech extends to reporting of judicial proceedings. It noted further: "it would be retrograde for this court to promote the rule of law and access to justice on one hand and shield the daily operations of the High Courts and this court from the media in all its forms, by gagging the reporting of proceedings, on the other."

In addition to seeking expunging of remarks, the Commission asked for some form of media censorship as well, as far as court reporting is concerned. Although the court rejected this demand, this conduct of the Commission is an extension of its recent backsliding as a constitutional body. The EC has been accused of subserving those holding power at the Centre. The institution is criticised for alleged political bias and partisanship. It faces serious trust deficit.

We have two basic enactments dealing with elections – The Representation of the People Acts of 1950 and 1951. The EC has a pivotal role under both the legislations. The Act of 1950 deals with delimitation of constituencies, preparation of electoral roll etc. The latter enactment deals with conduct of the election. Section 125 of this statute contains a significant warning. It penalises whoever promotes enmity between classes, in connection with election, on the ground of religion, community etc. It is a statutory deterrent against using hate to solicit votes. The law encompasses many such activities and label them as punishable offences. Preventing the offence is a sound forensic principle. Viewed so, the EC must act as a constant guard for maintaining a healthy democracy.

One can see that the coalition politics in India gave better functional autonomy to the EC. The period between 1989 and 2014 illustrates this point. The Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi, in a 1996 survey found that the EC had captured the people's trust and even the judiciary in India had to remain only next to it, in terms of public's faith. The nation witnessed the proactive impartiality of TN Seshan for whom the implementation of Model Code of Conduct was an integral part of any election. His tenure conveyed the message of free and fair election to the public at large. The point, however, is that the systemic deficits cannot be rectified by the emergence of individuals.

After the resurrection of the majoritarianism, political parties used religious feelings as an easy and effective tool to canvass votes. The Commission failed to check hate speech in (and since) 2014 when the BJP got majority in the Lok Sabha. The Congress, too, had played foul many a times when it enjoyed absolute majority. But due to an active judiciary and better ethics in politics during the period following the Independence, the institutional damage to the EC was minimal.

The Commission has no police force of its own. It has no 'purse or sword.' For the conduct of election, it must depend upon the central forces and the state police. The recent Bengal election was marred by hate as a political device, for which the innocent public had to pay a heavy cost even in terms of their lives.

In his classic work, journalist Philip Coggan explained the crisis faced by the Western democracies. His book published in 2013 had a cautioning title- 'The Last Vote.' The electoral reforms in India need to begin with reimagining the EC. It should be revamped both structurally and functionally to preserve our electoral democracy

Formed in 1950, the EC has travelled a long and difficult path since then. The body is chosen by the executive. The irony is direct and embarrassing - an appointee by the majoritarian executive is expected to act judiciously and independently, when confronted with political parties. This is a fundamental flaw in the design of the EC. A free and fair process to select the EC is, therefore, an imperative for the fulfilment of its role as a neutral arbiter. An assertive EC should be politically non-affiliative.

It is also essential to minimise the EC's dependence on the executive for doing its constitutional duty. An independent law enforcing agency as visualised by the Supreme Court in the Prakash Singh case (2006) can go a long way to ensure functional autonomy for the EC.

In the Vineet Narain case (1997), the Supreme Court had evolved a select panel consisting of the Prime Minister, the Home Minister, and the opposition leader for choosing the Central Vigilance Commissioner "from a panel of outstanding civil servants and others with impeccable integrity, to be furnished by the Cabinet Secretary." Likewise, a better select body was suggested to choose the CBI Director as well. The selection of the EC needs to have a representative, divergent and participative character.

In his classic work, journalist Philip Coggan explained the crisis faced by the democracies. His book published in 2013 had a cautioning title- '*The Last Vote*.' The electoral reforms in India need to begin with reimagining the EC. It should be revamped both structurally and functionally to preserve our electoral democracy.

QUOTE CORNER

I warmly welcome (the US') willingness to engage with proponents of a temporary waiver of the TRIPS agreement to help in combating the Covid pandemic. ...the extraordinary circumstances call for extraordinary measures

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, WTO Director-General

Deeply concerned by the heightened tensions & violence in & around Jerusalem. I call on all to act responsibly & maintain calm. All must respect the status quo of holy sites in Jerusalem's Old City in the interest of peace & stability.

Tor Vennesland, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process

The doctors are very happy with recovery progress. He is out of life support and breathing on his own. Managed to exchange a few words. Promised to come back stronger. I believe him

Ibrahim Nashid, brother of Maldives ex-prez Mohamed Nasheed

MAILBAG WRITE TO letters@newindianexpress.com

Profiteering in painful times

This has reference to the news 'Pandemic profiteering adds to patient stress'. What conclusion one could draw after reading the article which depicted the haplessness and helplessness of the kin of patients is though India is a multi-cultural country, the common thread is many private hospitals and pharmacies have one objective. The debasing way they exploited the patients, insisting to pay exorbitant amount from the weeping relatives is atrocious. Now is the time for those private hospitals to show their CSR spirit. It appears contrasting when people from ordinary background become Samaritans, affordable healthcare institutions are fleecing the patients.

K Jayanthi, Chennai

IPR waiver a boon

It is with reference to the editorial, "IP waiver best option to contain pandemic"- May 8. In the current global health emergency, 70 percent of the world population needs to be inoculated to tide over the pandemic. Unless they are vaccinated, the developed countries will remain under threat of virus mutation. With the limited production capacity of vaccine developers and their licensees, it will take several years to cater to the entire world. The IPR waiver may allow faster technology transfer and production of vaccines in the countries that have the production capacity. The waiver is requested until majority of the world's population is made immune post-vaccination. This may help in vaccinating masses in a shorter time.

P Victor Selvaraj , Tamil Nadu

Go for better vax planning

It will be good to know how long the vaccination provides immunity, whether it is one-time affair or to be taken bi-annually or annually like flu vaccine. If to be taken periodically then the government needs to plan lot more in terms of manufacture, imports, storage and other logistics. As of now, the virus is deadly, spreading fast resulting in numerous loss of precious lives. Better planning is immediately required to be safe than feeling sorry.

D Ramasubramanian, Bengaluru

Bengal: End post-poll violence

Now that the TMC has won absolute majority in Bengal, its cadres have a far more greater responsibility to conduct itself in a matured and sagacious style. They have to end authoritarianism. Wiser counsels have prevailed upon the state electorate so as not to be carried away by the communal bandwagon let loose by the BJP. However, it behoves on a national party like the BJP to show itself as a dignified opposition party rising much above the divisive and fissiparous tendencies

Seshagiri Row Karry, Hyderabad

US has to address gun culture

This has reference to the news 'Girl shoots 3 in US school'. It is shocking to read that a sixth grade girl brought gun to her school and shot two students and a custodian in Idaho. There were many shooting incidents in America recently. It is because of easy access to guns where parents have firearms legally or illegally. Though various administrations supported the move to eliminate the gun culture, it is not taking place because of gun lobbies who run a roaring business. The Biden administration ought to find a solution to get rid of this menace.

S Arjun Prasanna, Bengaluru

Quota benefits for what?

This refers to 'Maha govt to announce sops to pacify Marathas' (May 8). The apex court verdict vetoing Maharashtra regime's warped bid to allow quota benefits to Marathas is indeed vital. Reservation is not a panacea to improve the downtrodden. Branding an entire caste as a crushed one sans gauging all other social positions is overtly unscientific and also against the basic ethos of our secular democracy. It is akin to tagging a community as culprits, if a certain percentage is found involved in terrorism. Quota is still an enigma and ergo a comprehensive policy in the issue, sans crippling the secular essence of the nation is crucial.

Thomas KM, Kerala

THE NEW SUNDAY EXPRESS
Chairman of the Board: **Manoj Kumar Sonthalia** Editor: **G S Vasu**
Resident Editor (Karnataka) : **Santwana Bhattacharya*** Published by **R K Jhunjhunwala** on behalf of Express Publications (Madurai) Private Limited, at No. 1, Queen's Road, Bengaluru - 560 001 and printed by him at Express Press, Plot No. 2A, Bommasandra Industrial Area, 4th Phase, Survey No. 46, Part Yarandahalli Village, Jigani Hobli, Anekal Taluk. Bengaluru - 560 099. **Bengaluru.** Vol. 22, No.19. RNI Reg. No. KARENG\2000\03040. Phone: 080-22866893. * Responsible for selection of News under the PRB Act. **Copyright:** Express Publications (Madurai) Private Limited. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any manner, electronic or otherwise, in whole or in part, without prior written permission is prohibited.

TWEETS OF THE DAY

Shashi Tharoor @ShashiTharoor
Dream of a modern India is not dying; it needs to be healed through idealism, commitment & activism, as well as political change

Subramanian Swamy @Swamy39
I learn that EAM Jaishankar dressed like a Waiter has been placed in Quarantine in London and cannot return home yet !!

Dr Harsh Vardhan @drharshvardhan
Diagnostics, medicines, oxygen, or augmenting health infra..Rest assured Didi, whatever Bengal needs, Govt stands resolute to provide

Indian strain of Covid-19 twice as infectious as the UK variant: Study

Centre's consortium says there's greater need to wear two masks & maintain distancing

SUMI SUKANYA DUTTA @New Delhi

THE Indian strain of the coronavirus, B.1.617, is twice as infectious as the UK variant and thrice as contagious as the one behind last year's Covid-19 wave. Scientists involved in the whole genome sequencing told *TNIE* that the conclusion was based on the growth of the mtant in samples collected from districts.

"We have been examining this data carefully and the way this lineage of virus, also called double mutant, is growing as compared to others is remarkable," said a senior scientist involved in the INSACOG project, a consortium of several institutions under the National Centre for Disease Control to carry out an extensive genomic surveillance.

"For the public, there is a greater need to double mask and maintain social distancing as this virus is highly infectious," the scientist added.

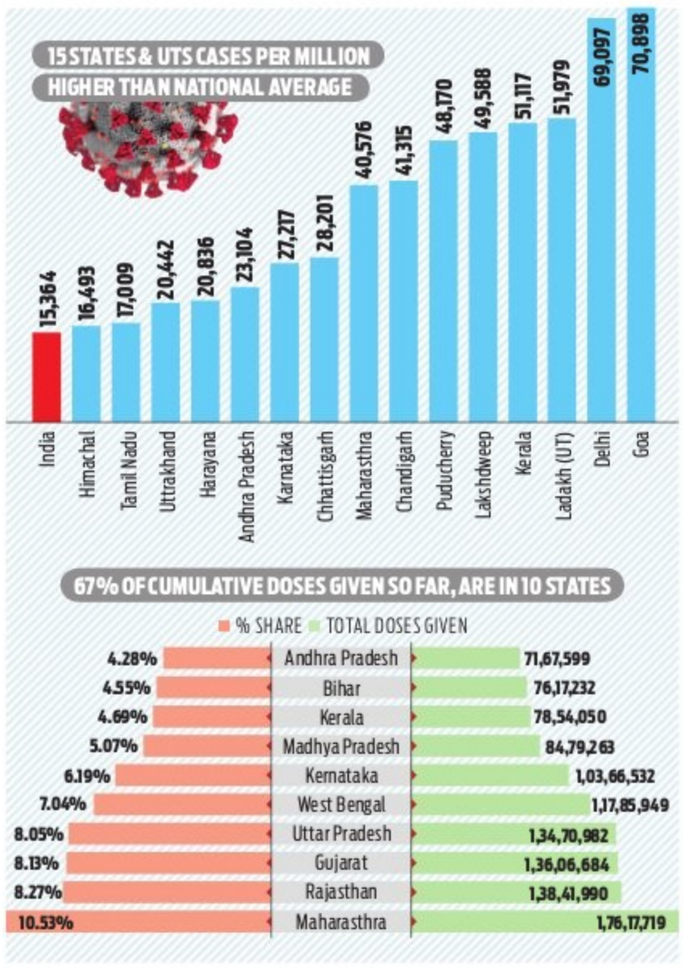
Their analysis, he said, has confirmed that B.1.617 is 50-70% more infectious as compared to the B.117 lineage or the UK variant. On Friday, the UK had declared B.1.617 a variant of concern (VOC).

On Monday last, NCDC director Sujeet Kumar Singh had declared the B.1.617 as VOC for the first time and suggested that it might be driving Covid cases in India. Singh, however, had insisted that an exercise was still underway to establish the correlation between the lineage's rise and its clinical and epidemiological significance.

As per the figures shared by him, samples collected from at least 18 states that have undergone genomic surveillance have shown the presence of this variant. In Kerala, B.1.617 has gone from 0% to 7% in two months while in the UK, too, this lineage changed from 0% to 6% over eight weeks.

"If both were equally infectious, they should also change at the same rate but that is not the case. The rate of growth of the double mutant virus is over twice that of the UK variant but we will have a clearer picture in a week's time," he said.

A study carried out by ICMR scientists, including its chief Balram Bhargava, has found that the B.1.617 lineage caused more severe disease in hamsters and raised the chances of hypoxia. But Shahid Jameel, chief advisor to INSACOG, said he was cautious but not yet "concerned". "I am not sure if they accurately predict disease severity in humans," he said.



COVID FIGHT

DRDO drug gets approval from DCGI

MAYANK SINGH @New Delhi

A DRDO lab has developed a Covid-19 drug which can be taken by patients with moderate to severe levels of illness. After a three-phase clinical trial, the drug (2-deoxy-D-glucose (2-DG) has been approved by the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI).

The Ministry of Defence on Saturday said: "Clinical trial results have shown that this molecule helps in faster recovery of hospitalised patients and reduces supplemental oxygen dependence. Higher proportion of patients treated with 2-DG showed RT-PCR negative conversion in patients. The drug will be of immense benefit to the people suffering from Covid-19."

The anti-Covid therapeutic application of the drug 2-DG has been developed by the Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences (INMAS), a lab of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), in collaboration with Dr Reddy's Laboratories (DRL), Hyderabad. Work on the drug began in April 2020, during the first wave of the pandemic with INMAS-DRDO scientists conducting laboratory experiments with the help of Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) Hyderabad.

TERMS OF REFERENCE OF NATIONAL TASK FORCE

12-member panel set up by SC will aim to create a measure of accountability for proper distribution of oxygen made available by the Centre to states

1. Assess and make recommendations for the entire country based on the need for, availability and distribution of medical oxygen
2. Formulate and devise methodology for the allocation of medical oxygen to the States and UTs on a scientific, rational and equitable basis
3. Make recommendations on augmenting the available supplies of oxygen based on present and projected demands likely during the pandemic
4. Facilitate audits by sub-groups within each State and UT inter alia for determining:
   - a. whether the supplies allocated by the Union Government reach the concerned State/UT
   - b. the efficacy of the distribution networks in distributing supplies meant for hospitals, health care institutions and others
   - c. whether the available stocks are being distributed on the basis of an effective, transparent and professional mechanism
   - d. accountability in regard to the utilisation of the supplies of oxygen allocated to each State/UT
5. Review and suggest measures necessary for ensuring the availability of essential drugs and medicines
6. Plan and adopt remedial measures for ensuring preparedness to meet present and future emergencies which may arise during the pandemic
7. Facilitate the use of technology to ensure that the available manpower is optimised for implementing innovative solutions particularly in order to provide an outreach of expert medical care to rural areas
8. Suggest measures to augment the availability of trained doctors, nurses and para-medical staff including by the creation of suitable incentives
9. Promote evidence based research to enhance effective responses to the pandemic
10. Facilitate the sharing of best practices across the nation to promote knowledge about the management of the pandemic and treatment of cases
11. Generally, to make recommendations in regard to other issues of pressing national concern to find effective responses to the pandemic

Another 2K oxygen concentrators received as aid

NEW DELHI: India received 2,060 oxygen concentrators, 30,000 vials of Remdesivir, 467 ventilators and three oxygen generation plants from US-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF), Switzerland, Poland, the Netherlands and Israel on Friday, the government said.

An official statement of the Union Health Ministry released on Saturday said that India has been receiving international donations and aid of Covid-19 relief medical supplies and equipment since April 27, 2021 from different countries and organisations.

"Cumulatively, 6,608 Oxygen Concentrators, 3,856 Oxygen Cylinders, 14 Oxygen Generation Plants, 4,330 ventilators/Bi PAP and about three lakh Remdesivir vials have been delivered/ dispatched, from April 27, 2021 to May 7, 2021," it said.

Praising the global community for its support, the government said, "Reflecting the solidarity and goodwill towards India, the global community has extended a helping hand in supporting efforts of India in this collective fight against Covid-19."

It said the government has designed a streamlined and systematic mechanism for effective allocation, and prompt distribution and delivery of the support supplies received.

"This will help to supplement the medical infrastructure of the tertiary care institutions and recipient States/UTs, and strengthen their clinical management capacities for effective clinical management of the hospitalised Covid-19 patients. Effective immediate allocation, and streamlined delivery to the recipient states/UTs and institutions is an ongoing exercise. This is being comprehensively monitored by the Union Health Ministry on a regular basis," it said.

The ministry informed that around 100 oxygen concentrators were dispatched from Delhi to Assam on Saturday while a German Mobile Oxygen Production and Filling System, producing 360 litres of 93 per cent oxygen for medical use, and having a reserve oxygen tank of 420 litres was transported to DRDO in the morning, for use in their health facilities.Ventilators received from the Netherlands are on way from Delhi to Telangana, the ministry further said.

ENS with agenices

A plane carrying 25,600 vials of Remdesivir arrives in Mumbai on Saturday | PTI

Rlys isolation coaches in 7 states

New Delhi: The Ministry of Railways has deployed isolation coaches in seven states across the country to cater to Covid-care patients. As many as 298 coaches have been handed over to various states for Covid care with a bed-capacity of more than 4,700 beds, according to the ministry. The Railways aim to provide separate temporary units in dedicated coaches for men and women healthcare personnel. The RPF staff have been posted at these health care facilities throughout the day. The Railways has also made provision of two oxygen cylinders and fire extinguishers in each coach in case of emergencies. Among other things, the Railways has also enabled directional guidance, ramp facility for patient transport at these coaches.

Quacks blamed for surge in Ch'garh

Raipur: Quacks were apparently seen as one of the key reasons behind the spread of Covid infections in villages of Chhattisgarh. During a meeting to review the containment measures in three zones of Raipur, Durg and Sarguja, Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel was informed that quacks were accountable for the rise in coronavirus infections in the rural belt. The chief minister directed the officials that the records of patients attended by the quacks and the treatment prescribed by them should be made available with the regional medical officer. "The situation in Raipur and Durg zone is improving and now under control. But still a lot more needs to be done. Owing to the negligence in the rural areas there is spike in coronavirus infections," the chief minister said.

A doctor does a check-up of a new born baby in an isolation ward in Mumbai | PTI

Modi praises Thackeray for containment efforts

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday spoke to the CMs of four states, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, separately over the phone and discussed the Covid-19 situation.

Speaking to CM Uddhav Thackeray, Modi appraised the Maharashtra government's work to tackle the Covid-19 in the state. Thackeray also thanked Modi for the Centre's guidance and cooperation during the pandemic. In a letter to Modi, Thackeray said the vaccination drive in Maharashtra has been the "fastest and the most efficient in the country". At present, people have to register their names on CoWIN platform introduced by the central government for the vaccination. "As we plan to open up vaccination for the 18 to 45 age group through the state's procurement, the CoWIN app is seeing a sudden surge in the number of citizens wanting to register nationally. There is fear about the app malfunctioning and crashing as it did on the first day of registration of the age group," he said.

Tamil Nadu CM M K Stalin requested the Centre to enhance the oxygen allocation to Tamil Nadu to 500 MT. The CM assured the PM that the state would stand by the Centre in the fight. The PM assured Stalin that he would consider his request immediately.

Madhya Pradesh CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan apprised Modi of the Covid situation including the improving recovery rate, the CMO said. Modi expressed satisfaction about the MP government's efforts and the measures it has taken to curb the infection rate, the CMO said.

Jaishankar, team test negative, back in India

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @New Delhi

EXTERNAL Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has returned to India from London following self-isolation after reports of two diplomats from his delegation having tested positive for the coronavirus emerged.

Jaishankar said that the reports of his team members testing positive was a false alarm. "Good to be back home, all of us having tested negative for Covid. These are difficult times and false alarms do happen. Thank those who sent their good wishes," the minister tweeted.

Following reports in the UK media hours after Jaishankar met US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and UK Home Secretary Priti Patel, the external affairs minister had self-isolated and made all his future meetings in the UK virtual as a measure of abundant caution.

"Was made aware yesterday evening of exposure to possible Covid positive cases. As a measure of abundant caution and also out of consideration for others, I decided to conduct my engagements in the virtual mode. That will be the case with the G7 Meeting today as well," the minister had tweeted on May 5.

Jaishankar had arrived in London on Monday for a four-day visit at the invitation of UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab to participate in the G7 Foreign and Development Ministers Meeting as a guest minister.

EXPRESS READ

Western Command sets up 3 hospitals

Chandigarh: The Army's Western Command has set-up three 100-bed Covid hospitals at Chandigarh, Patiala and Faridabad for treatment of mild to moderate symptomatic patients. These facilities will open for civilians on May 10. The Army also provided eight service ambulances in polyclinics across the National Capital Region (NCR) to overcome the shortage of ambulances. It has already delpoyed 108 doctors, 14 nursing officers and 205 paramedics in various hospitals set up by DRDO. Western Command has footprints in Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Chandigarh, Jammu and Kashmir and Delhi.

Spl screening drive in rural Haryana

HARPREET BAJWA @Chandigarh

A steady rise in Covid cases in Haryana's rural areas has prompted the state government to adopt a proactive 'test, track and treat' strategy, which will include a special door-to-door screening drive by 8,000 multidisciplinary teams.

CM Manohar Lal Khattar, who took a review meeting with top officials of the health and panchayat department on Saturday, directed that proactive strategies should be launched to contain the spread of the virus to rural areas. The steps should include door-to-door screening camps and converting dharamshalas, government schools and AYUSH centres into isolation wings. "We have to protect rural areas against this infection. Each officer should ensure that special vigilance is kept on all villages," he said.

A special awareness campaign-cum-counseling of rural inhabitants should be undertaken. "Health department officials along with ASHA workers and former and present public representatives in each village panchayat have to play key roles in encouraging people to get tested in screening camps," he said. Khattar said 8,000 multidisciplinary teams led by trainee doctors and health department officials, ASHA and Anganwadi workers should be constituted across the state to ensure screening of households in each village. He said screening of every family should be done along with recording of their oxygen and temperature levels.

"If during a screening camp, a person is found with symptoms, then the person should be advised to stay at home. Approximately one team per 500 households should be deployed for conducting the health screening," he said.

The CM said while conducting screening, the teams should ensure that the patients having mild and moderate symptoms are given prescribed preventive medicines.

Yogi govt told to procure vaccines immediately

Relatives mourn the death of a Covid patient in Prayagraj | PTI

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Lucknow

OBSERVING that "unless every individual is protected, no one is safe," the Allahabad High Court has directed the Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh to find ways and means to ensure immediate procurement of Covid vaccines, so that all in the state may get vaccinated with its complete doses within three to four months.

Hearing a bunch of petitions pertaining to the Covid-19 situation in the state on Friday, a division bench of the HC, comprising Justices Ajit Kumar and Siddhartha Varma, asked the UP government about its stand on procuring the Covid vaccines. The state government counsels submitted that besides procuring the two vaccines from Indian manufacturers, the UP government has also floated global tenders for getting vaccines.

The court held, "We are of the opinion that tender is a long drawn process and if we run late in vaccinating a large number of the population in the state, we may lose the real desired result of vaccination, as the virus may achieve such mutations which may neutralise the vaccine also. Since a large number of people are getting infected daily and the scientists are of the view that the third wave is almost at the door steps of India, it is necessary that the government should enter into direct dialogue with vaccine producers with the help of Indian diplomats in those countries. We must remember that in the context of Covid-19 virus, unless every individual is protected, no one is safe."

"We accordingly, direct the state government to find ways and means to ensure immediate procurement of vaccines so that all in Uttar Pradesh may get vaccinated with its complete doses within 3-4 months' time and tell us on the next date fixed how it proposes to expedite purchase of vaccines from global market," the high court observed in the detailed order.

MAN MAULED TO DEATH BY LION

A 35-year-old man was mauled to death by a lion at Madhupur village in Gujarat's Junagadh district in the wee hours of Saturday, a forest official said. The incident occurred in Talala range of Gir (west) forest division

4kg OF HEROIN SEIZED AT MUMBAI AIRPORT

	Max	Min		Max	Min
Ahmedabad	42	28	Mumbai	34	29
Bhopal	40	25	Panaji	33	28
Jaipur	39	29	Patna	37	23
Amritsar	37	21	Lucknow	39	24
Chennai	33	28	Port Blair	29	25
Kolkata	33	26	Imphal	28	14
Srinagar	24	10	Chandigarh	36	22

India, EU to resume talks on FTA after eight years

PUSHKAR BANAKAR @New Delhi

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi and leaders of the European Union on Saturday agreed to resume negotiations on the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and launch a connectivity partnership during the India-EU Summit.

Addressing the media after the summit, Secretary (West) in the Ministry of External Affairs Vikas Swarup said, "A high-level dialogue led by the Commerce Ministry will decide the FTA timelines. All outstanding issues which have appeared in the past will be on the agenda when talks resume."

The talks are set to resume after they were shelved eight years ago over disagreements on issues like tariffs, market access and data privacy.

In a joint statement issued after the summit, India and the EU agreed to resume negotiations for a balanced, ambitious, comprehensive and mutually beneficial trade agreement that would respond to the current challenges.

"We agreed that in order to create the required positive dynamic for negotiations, it is imperative to find solutions to long-standing market access issues. We also agreed to the launch of negotiations on a standalone investment protection agreement. We also agreed to start negotiations on a separate agreement on geographical indications," the statement added.

Modi also sought EU support for IPR waiver on Covid vaccines at the WTO, a proposal which was floated jointly by India and South Africa. Earlier this week, US President Joe Biden announced his administration's backing to the proposal.

"Each EU leader underlined the need for vaccine cooperation to tackle the pandemic," Swarup said. "We will watch the EU's evolving position on the proposal at the WTO," he added.

Mamata begins Assembly session with attacks on Centre, poll panel

Claims the BJP would not have won even 30 seats had it not been for support from the EC

PRANAB MONDAL @ Kolkata

ON the first day of the Assembly session after the new government was sworn in, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday lashed out at the Centre over "stepmotherly treatment" and slammed the Election Commission for helping the BJP in the elections.

Addressing the House, Mamata said had the Election Commission not helped the BJP, the saffron camp would not even have won 30 seats. None of the BJP's 77 elected MLAs, who took oath on Friday, was present in the House on Saturday as the party's West Bengal leader Dilip Ghosh had directed them to boycott the proceedings in protest against the post-poll violence against the BJP workers.

"I requested the central government to increase the allocation of medical oxygen for West Bengal. Instead of paying heed to our request, they are taking away medical oxygen produced in our state and giving them to other states. This is Centre's step-motherly behaviour with West Bengal," Mamata said.

She also expressed surprise at the speed with which the Centre sent a team to probe the post-poll violence.

"It was not even 24 hours, I was sworn in and they (the Centre) sent a letter on the same day and a team on the next day. This is unprecedented," she said.

The Bengal chief minister also sought to mount pressure on the Centre over vaccination. "I wrote to the Centre in February, seeking its nod for the procurement of vaccines by the state. But there was no response. We want to give vaccines for all in the state," she said.

"Besides, I wrote a letter to the Prime Minister demanding free universal vaccination in the country. For this, the Centre will have to spend ₹30,000 crore, which is nothing. They are focused on building a new Parliament, buying new aircraft for the PM and erecting giant statues, which cost more than that," she said. Mamta also accused the BJP's national leadership of spreading Covid-19 infection in the state by holding major rallies before the election. She charged that the Election Commission deployed a large number of central police force personnel in the state for election duties without testing them for Covid-19.

Bengal guv summons chief secy over poll violence

Kolkata: West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar on Saturday summoned the state's Chief Secretary over the post-poll violence. Dhankhar said the home secretary did not forward reports of the state's DGP and commissioner of Kolkata police to him in this regard.

The poll panel directly helped the BJP. Had they not done it, BJP would not have won even 30 seats
Mamata Banerjee

(Far left) West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee on the first day of the new Assembly session on Saturday; (left) three new TMC MLAs— Aditi Munshi, Lovely Moitra and June Maliah—arrive for their first Assembly session | PTI

SONOWAL VS SARMA

Assam chief minister to be announced today

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi/Guwahati

THE BJP is likely to announce the name of the next Assam chief minister on Sunday as both local heavyweights Sarbananda Sonowal and Himanta Biswa Sarma met top functionaries J P Nadda and Amit Shah in Delhi.

The decision on who becomes the next Assam CM is likely to be taken at a BJP legislature party meeting in Guwahati. Union minister Narendra Singh Tomar and BJP general secretary Arun Singh are the central observers for the legislative party meeting.

Sarbananda Sonowal

Himanta Biswa Sarma

Summoned by the central leadership, Sonowal and Sarma left Guwahati in a chartered flight on Saturday morning. Both the leaders held lengthy discussions with the BJP brass. Before the meeting, Nadda, Shah and BJP general secretary BL Santhosh met Sarma and Sonowal individually, party insiders said. "The BJP Legislative Party meet may take place in Guwahati tomorrow (Sunday).

Answers to all questions will come out of that meeting," Sarma told the media as he left Nadda's residence.

Sources said Sarma's get up exuded confidence on his chances of taking over the CM seat from Sonowal. The BJP leadership is treading cautiously as it wants to avoid factionalism in the crucial Northeast state, they added.

While Sonowal belongs to Assam's indigenous Sonowal-Kachari tribe and enjoys a good image, his rival Sarma has been a trouble shooter as well as the convenor of the North East Democratic Alliance.

Interestingly, the BJP went ahead with the Assembly poll in March-April without announcing a candidate. The saffron party had said it would settle the issue after the election was over. In Assam, the BJP-led NDA retained power by winning 75 of the total 126 seats.

Sonowal, who belongs to Assam's indigenous Sonowal-Kachari tribals, and Sarma, an Assamese Brahmin who is the convenor of the North East Democratic Alliance, are contenders for the top post of the Assam government. The BJP had not announced a chief ministerial candidate before the Assembly polls.

Row over Central Vista continues, Puri says no jamun trees uprooted

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

THE political row over the Central Vista project refuses to cease. While Shiv Sena on Saturday slammed the government on the issue, Union urban affairs minister Hardeep Puri said: "Do not believe in fake photos & canards about ongoing work at Central Vista Avenue."

The minister claimed that no Jamun trees have been removed. He added that only a few trees will be transplanted due to the entire project and overall green cover will increase.

Earlier on Saturday, the Shiv Sena said that while smaller countries in the neighbourhood are offering help to India in tackling Covid-19, the Modi government is not even ready to stop the Central Vista project, whose cost runs into thousands of crores.

The party, through its mouthpiece *Saamana*, said that the system created in the past 70 years by previous prime ministers, including Pandit Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Manmohan Singh, has helped the country live through the tough times of the kind it is facing today.

Meanwhile, Union minister Hardeep Puri in a series of tweets said the transformed Central Vista will be a world class public space in the heart of the national capital. The project is progressing on schedule. With more public space, landscaping & modern amenities, it will eventually be something every Indian will be proud of, he said. "It will have more public space with refurbished lawns, paved walkways along Rajpath, improved landscape, clean canals, adequate public amenities, vending areas, public performance facilities, safe road crossings..." he added.

CROWN OF HIMACHAL

A bird's eye view of a city neighbourhood under a Covid-19 curfew in Kullu district on Saturday | PTI

EXPRESS READ

Maha to set up panel on Maratha quota

Mumbai: The Maharashtra government will set up a committee under a retired judge to study the Supreme Court order striking down reservations for the Maratha community, state minister Ashok Chavan said on Saturday. The apex court on May 4 struck down the Maharashtra law granting quota to Marathas in admissions and government jobs, terming the statute as "unconstitutional", and also refused to refer the 1992 Mandal judgement, setting a 50 per cent cap on reservation, to a larger bench for reconsideration. "The entire process comprises selection comprises selection and recruitment," Chavan said.

Army inducts 1st batch of women military police

MAYANK SINGH @New Delhi

THE Indian Army inducted its first batch of the women Military Police, at soldiers level, on Saturday after a grueling training period of more than a year. The soldiers will be posted in units across the country.

The trainees successfully completed the intense 61 weeks of training on aspects related to basic military training, Provost training (which includes policing duties and management of prisoners of war), ceremonial duties and skill development (which entails driving and the maintenance of all vehicles) and communications through signals.

Brigadier C Dayalan, Commandant of the CMP Centre & School reviewed the attestation parade. The parade was conducted as a low-key event while observing all Covid-19 protocols, said Army.

The Commandant of the CMP Centre & School while reviewing the parade complimented the newly attested women soldiers for their impeccable drill.

The attestation parade of the first batch of 83 women soldiers at Dronacharya Parade Ground of Corps of Military Police Centre & School in Bengaluru | PTI

The Indian Army is likely to induct a total of 17,00 women soldiers into CMP (Corps of Military Police) with the induction of 100 soldiers every year till it reaches the required number. The adjustments to cater to those leaving or unable to complete the training will be made in batches joining in the future. The decision for inducting women soldiers was announced in January, 2019 with an aim to enhance their representation in the three services.

Women will eventually comprise 20% of the total CMP and their role would range from probing crime cases to assisting the Army in field operations wherever required. Currently, women are allowed to join as officers in medical, legal, education, signals and engineering wings of the Army.

At the beginning of training, 100 women were selected. As per the initial plan, shared by the Army, ten women jawans, collectively termed as a Section, will be posted with 10 CMP Provost units that were identified and pre-informed for preparations of infrastructure.

Caste violence erupts in MP over teenager's Facebook post, 11 arrested

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bhopal

CASTE violence reared its ugly head in Madhya Pradesh's Morena district on Saturday over a Facebook post by a teenager.

Amid a Covid lockdown, dozens of masked men, mostly youngsters from an OBC group, rode on their motorcycles through a 1 km stretch in Morena town's Bankhandi Road area, wielding guns and firing indiscriminately.

A number of vehicles and other properties owned by members of a general category caste were damaged.

A woman was injured after a pellet hit her head.

According to the Morena police, Saturday's violence arose out of the hostility between a powerful OBC group and an equally powerful general category caste. A teenager from the OBC group, who hails from Dabra town of adjoining Gwalior district, posted objectionable content on Facebook about members of the general category caste recently. Though the teenager later posted a video appologising for the act after being booked by the police, that was not enough to calm the nerves of those who took offense at his social media post.

In a fit of rage, a few men belonging to the general category caste rushed to the area where the relatives of the teenager live and assaulted some of them on Saturday. .

This then enraged some members of the OBC group, leading to some of them setting off on bikes wielding guns. So far, three cases have been registered and 11 people have been arrested, Inspector General of Police (Chambal Range) Manoj Sharma said.

Of the arrested, five are from one caste and six from the other.

Thackeray's uneasy relationship with media

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has always had an uneasy relationship with journalists since the time of the late Bal Thackeray. After becoming the chief minister, he started speaking to media, but only with those that are friendly to him. Besides that, he also believed in delivering monologues that have been frequently witnessed in pandemic through his state address, similar to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Mann Ki Baat. Several journalist associations wrote and asked Thackeray to declare journalists as front line workers, because other states such as Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal have done so. His alliance partner minister Balasaheb Thorat also wrote a letter to him on this important matter, but so far such pleas have fallen on deaf ears

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MUMBAI DIARY

Sharad Pawar finishes post-surgery recovery

A month after a successful gall bladder surgery at Breach Candy hospital, NCP chief Sharad Pawar has resumed his active participation in politics. Right on the first day of his return, Pawar dashed off a letter to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, asking him to allow the hotels and permit bar-restaurants to pay the taxes in four instalments apart from concessions in power bill etc. Pawar, in his letter, said that amid the pandemic, the hospitality sector is suffering a lot, and so, they need help. However, Pawar's demand of support for the permit bar-restaurants has been criticised by some people, who noted that Pawar has time for bars and restaurants but not common people and journalists, who are also suffering due to the pandemic.

Fadnavis alleges Covid data fudging in Maha

The Mumbai model of controlling the Covid-19 pandemic has been appreciated by many, including the Supreme Court and PM Narendra Modi himself. The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation has managed to limit the damage of the second wave by doing remarkable work in managing the supply of oxygen. This success of the Thackeray govt seems to have unnerved leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnavis. Fadnavis alleged that Mumbai is testing less and that has resulted in the recording of fewer cases. He also accused Thackeray of fudging the coronavirus data

Time for Mumbai model in Nagpur?

Nagpur is witnessing a large number of Covid-19 positive cases in the second wave despite having strong leaders such as Union minister Nitin Gadkari and Leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnavis from this city. The Nagpur Municipal Corporation is ruled by the BJP. It has more active cases than Mumbai. In a meeting held by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, the administration has blamed the interference of these leaders, which has resulted in administrative shortcomings, and hence, the rise in cases. However, they promised that henceforth they will not listen to any leader, but will implement the Mumbai model in Nagpur.

UK FINALISES POST-LOCKDOWN TRAVEL PLAN
London: People from England will be able to travel to 12 nations quarantine-free when the country's lockdown restrictions are lifted on May 17. But India, the Maldives, Nepal and Turkey are in the 'red list' of around 40 countries.

LIBYAN MILITIAS BRIEFLY TAKE OVER TRIPOLI GOVT HEADQUARTERS
Cairo: In a show of force, armed militiamen briefly took over a hotel in the Libyan capital of Tripoli that serves as headquarters for the interim government. Friday's development came after the three-member council earlier this week appointed a new chief of the intelligence.

200 PALESTINIANS INJURED IN CLASHES WITH POLICE AT AL-AQSA

Violence erupted when Israeli police in riot gear deployed in large numbers as Muslim worshippers were holding evening prayers | Cops said six of their personnel were also hurt

JERUSALEM

A NIGHT of heavy clashes between Palestinians and Israeli police at the Al-Aqsa mosque compound and elsewhere in Jerusalem left more than 200 Palestinians wounded, medics said on Saturday, as the city braced for even more violence after weeks of unrest.

Nightly protests broke out at the start of the holy month of Ramadan over police restrictions at a popular gathering place and have reignited in recent days over threatened eviction of Palestinians from their homes in east Jerusalem, which is claimed by both sides in the decades-old conflict.

It was unclear what set off the violence at Al-Aqsa, which erupted when Israeli police in riot gear deployed in large numbers as thousands of Muslim worshippers were holding evening prayers at the sprawling hilltop esplanade.

Throughout the night large groups of protesters could be seen hurling rocks as Israeli police fired rubber bullets and stun grenades. At one point, the police entered one of the buildings in the complex, which includes the Al-Aqsa mosque and the golden Dome of the Rock.

The Palestinian Red Crescent emergency service said 88 of the wounded were hospitalised. The Palestinian health ministry said 83 people were wounded by rubber-coated bullets, including three who were shot in the eye, two with head injuries and two with broken jaws.

The Israeli police said protesters hurled stones, fireworks and other objects at them, wounding six officers who required medical treatment. "We will respond with a heavy hand to all violent disturbances, riots and attacks on our forces," it said in a statement.

The Al-Aqsa mosque compound is the third holiest site in Islam. It is also the holiest site for Jews, who refer to it as the Temple Mount because it was the location of the biblical temples. It has long been a flashpoint in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and was the epicenter of the 2000 Palestinian intifada, or uprising.

Some 70,000 worshippers had attended the final midday Friday prayers of Ramadan at Al-Aqsa, the Islamic endowment that oversees the site said. Thousands protested afterwards, waving the green flags of the Islamic militant group Hamas and chanting pro-Hamas slogans.

At the beginning of Ramadan in mid-April, Israel blocked off a popular gathering spot where Palestinians traditionally socialize at the end of their daylong fast. The move set off two weeks of clashes before Israel lifted the restrictions. But in recent days, protests have grown over Israel's threatened eviction in Sheikh Jarrah in east Jerusalem of dozens of Palestinians embroiled in a long legal battle with Israeli settlers trying to acquire property in the neighbourhood.

The United States said it was 'deeply concerned' about both the violence and the threatened evictions, and was in contact with leaders on both sides to try and de-escalate tensions.

"It is critical to avoid steps that exacerbate tensions or take us farther away from peace," the US State Department said in a statement. "This includes evictions in East Jerusalem, settlement activity, home demolitions, and acts of terrorism." The European Union also urged calm. It said the potential evictions were of 'serious concern," adding that such actions are "illegal under international humanitarian law and only serve to fuel tensions on the ground.

Neighboring Jordan, which made peace with Israel in 1994 and is the custodian of Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem, has also condemned Israel's actions, as has the Gulf kingdom of Bahrain, which normalized relations with Israel last year in a US-brokered deal.

Israelis and Palestinians are bracing for more unrest in the coming days.

Sunday night is 'Laylat al-Qadr' or the 'Night of Destiny,' the most sacred in the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Worshippers will gather for intense nighttime prayers at Al-Aqsa.

Sunday night is also the start of Jerusalem Day, a national holiday in which Israel celebrates its annexation of east Jerusalem and religious nationalists hold parades and other celebrations in the city. On Monday, an Israeli court is expected to issue a verdict on the evictions. Israel captured east Jerusalem, along with the West Bank and Gaza 'territories the Palestinians want for their future state' in the 1967 Mideast war. Israel annexed east Jerusalem in a move not recognised internationally. *AP*

An Israeli policeman shouts at a Palestinian man to leave the Damascus Gate to the Old City of Jerusalem | AP

> It is critical to avoid steps that exacerbate tensions. This includes evictions in East Jerusalem, settlement activity, home demolitions, and acts of terrorism
> US State Dept

NIGHT OF UNREST
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THE HOLY COMPOUND
Al-Aqsa mosque compound is the third holiest site in Islam. It is also the holiest site for Jews, who refer to it as the Temple Mount because it was the location of the biblical temples

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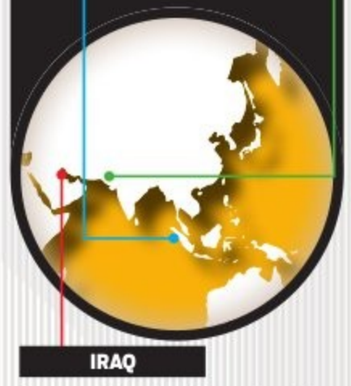
ASIA MATTERS



PHILIPPINES

Troops drive away armed rebels from market

Cotabato: Dozens of Muslim militants occupied a public market overnight in the southern Philippines before fleeing after a tense standoff with government forces, officials said Saturday. The Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters did not take any hostage or put up resistance when army troops and police took positions at dawn Saturday near the public market in the farming town of Datu Paglas, said military spokesman Lt. Col. John Paul Baldomar. "They went into the market and stole food but got stuck inside when they saw that our forces have taken positions to ensure other buildings could not be threatened," he said. There were no immediate reports of injuries or deaths. The rebel group broke off from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front after it entered into peace talks and later signed a Muslim autonomy deal with the government in 2014. *AP*

IRAQ

Drone attack on base hosting US troops; no casualties

Baghdad: A drone strike early on Saturday targeted a military base in Iraq that hosts US troops, causing only minor damage and no casualties, Iraq's military and the US-led coalition said. The pore-dawn attack damaged a hangar, tweeted coalition spokesman Col. Wayne Marotto. He said the attack was under investigation. An Iraqi military statement also said no losses were reported. No one has claimed responsibility for the attack. The US has blamed Iran-backed militia groups for previous attacks, most of them rocket attacks. *AP*

PAKISTAN

Hindu woman cracks Superior Services exam

Islamabad: In a first, a Hindu woman in Pakistan has cleared the country's prestigious Central Superior Services (CSS) examination and has been selected for the elite Pakistan Administrative Services (PAS). Sana Ramachand is an MBBS doctor, hailing from rural area of Shikarpur district in Sindh province, which has the largest Hindu population in Pakistan. She is one of the 221 candidates declared successful in the CSS examination out of the 18,553 who had appeared in the written tests. The final selection has been made after an elaborate medical, psychological and oral tests. After the result, Ramchand tweeted: "Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh," and added, "I'm pleased to share that by the grace of Allah Almighty, I have cleared the CSS 2020 and been allocated to PAS. All credit goes to my parents." The pass percentage in the latest CSS has been less than 2% . *PTI*

Bomb blast near school kills at least 30 in Kabul

Afghan school students being treated at a hospital after a bomb explosion near a school in Kabul on Saturday | AP

KABUL

A BOMB exploded near a girls school in a majority Shiite district of west Kabul on Saturday, killing at least 30 people, many them young pupils between 11 and 15 years old, Afghan government spokesmen said. The Taliban condemned the attack apparently aimed at civilians, and denied any responsibility.

The explosion is being investigated, said Interior Ministry spokesman Tariq Arian who added the death toll could rise further. mbulances were rushing to evacuate wounded from the scene of the blast near Syed Al-Shahda school, in the Shiite majority neighborhood of Dasht-e-Barchi, Interior Ministry spokesman Tariq Arian said.

> Several ambulances had been rushed to the site and were evacuating the wounded. People in the area are angry and have beaten a number of ambulance workers
> Dastagir Nazari, health ministry spokesperson

Residents in the area said the explosion was deafening. One, Naser Rahimi, said he heard three separate explosions, although there was no official confirmation of multiple blasts. Rahimi also said he believed that the sheer power of the explosion meant the death toll would almost certainly climb.

While no one has claimed responsibility for the bombing, previous brutal attacks in the same neighborhood have been claimed by the Afghan Islamic State affiliate.

The radical Sunni Muslim group has declared war on Afghanistan's minority Shiite Muslims. Washington blamed IS for a vicious attack last year in a maternity hospital in the same area that killed pregnant women and newborn babies.

In Dasht-e-Barchi, angry crowds attacked aambulances and even beat health workers as they tried to evacuate the wounded, Health Ministry spokesman Ghulam Dastigar Nazari said. He implored residents to cooperate and allow ambulances free access to the site.

Images circulating on social media purportedly showed bloodied school backpacks and books strewn across the street in front if the school, and smoke rising above the neighborhood.

At one nearby hospital, journalists saw at least 20 dead bodies lined up in hallways and rooms, with dozens of wounded people and families of victims pressing through the facility. *AP*

Patent waiver no 'magic bullet': EU

PORTO, PORTUGAL

EUROPEAN Union leaders cranked up their criticism of the United States' call to waive Covid-19 vaccine patents Saturday, arguing the move would bring no short or midterm relief. They instead urged Washington to lift export restrictions if it wants to have a global impact on the pandemic.

"We don't think, in the short term, that it's the magic bullet," said EU Council President Charles Michel on the second day of an EU summit in Portugal. French President Emmanuel Macron insisted that giving any priority to discussing intellectual property rights now, "is a false debate."

Instead, they joined previous EU calls for U.S. President Joe Biden to start boosting U.S. vaccine exports to contain the global COVID-19 crisis, insisting it was the most urgent need. "We encourage all to facilitate the export of doses," said Michel.

While the US has kept a tight lid on exports of American-made vaccines so it can inoculate its own population first, the EU has become the world's leading provider, allowing about as many doses to go outside the 27-nation bloc as are kept for its 446 million inhabitants.

The EU has distributed about 200 million doses within the bloc while about the same amount had been exported abroad to almost 90 countries.

The EU is trying to regain the diplomatic initiative on vaccines after Biden put it on the back foot with his surprising endorsement of lifting patent protections on Covid-19 vaccines. *AP*

Police shooting prompts claims of abuse in Brazil

RIO DE JANEIRO

A BLOODY, hour-long gunbattle in a Rio de Janeiro slum echoed into Friday, with authorities saying the police killed two dozen criminals while residents and activists claimed human rights abuses and a Supreme Court justice hinted at an investigation.

It was just after sunrise Thursday when dozens of officers from Rio de Janeiro state's civil police stormed Jacarezinho, a favela in the city's northern zone. They were targeting drug traffickers from one of Brazil's most notorious criminal organizations, Comando Vermelho, and the bodies piled up quickly.

When the fighting stopped, there were 28 dead — one police officer and 27 people described by the police as "criminals." A day after the raid, Rio police had identified the 48-year-old officer who died, but none of the others killed in the operation.

Rio's moniker of "Marvelous City" can often seem a cruel irony in the favelas, given their violent conflicts, stark poverty and subjugation to drug traffickers or militias. But even here, Thursday's clash was a jarring anomaly that analysts declared one of the city's deadliest police operations ever.

And it was by far the most violent since Brazil's Supreme Court issued a ruling banning most such actions during the pandemic, which drew a rebuke from the U.N.'s human rights office. *AP*

SHOUTS OF PROTEST
A woman shouts slogans during a march demanding justice for the people who died in Monday's subway collapse in Mexico City in which at least 25 people died and 70 injured | AP/PTI

LENS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Online speech shield under fire as Trump ban stays

WASHINGTON

LURKING beneath Facebook's decision on whether to continue Donald Trump's suspension from its platform is a far more complex and consequential question: Do the protections carved out for companies when the internet was in its infancy 25 years ago make sense when some of them have become global powerhouses with almost unlimited reach?

The companies have provided a powerful megaphone for Trump, other world leaders and billions of users to air their grievances, even ones that are false or damaging to someone's reputation, knowing that the platforms themselves were shielded from liability for content posted by users. Now that shield is getting a critical look in the current climate of hostility toward Big Tech and the social environment of political polarisation, hate speech and violence against minorities.

The debate is starting to take root in Congress, and the action this week by Facebook's quasi-independent oversight board upholding the company's suspension of Trump's accounts could add momentum to that legislative effort.

Under the 1996 Communications Decency Act, digital platform companies have legal protection both for content they carry and for removing postings they deem offensive. The shelter from lawsuits and prosecution applies to social media posts, uploaded videos, user reviews of restaurants or doctors, classified ads ' or the doxing underworld of thousands of websites that profit from false and defamatory information on individuals.

Section 230 of the law, which outlines the shield, was enacted when many of the most powerful social media companies didn't even exist. It allowed companies like Facebook, Twitter and Google to grow into the behemoths they are today. Republicans accuse the social media platforms of suppressing conservative voices and giving a stage to foreign leaders branded as dictators. Democrats and civil rights groups decry the digital presence of far-right extremists and pin blame on the platforms for disseminating hate speech and stoking extremist violence. *AP*

> Section 230 (of the Communications Decency Act) is a serious threat to our national security and election integrity. It should be revoked immediately — Joe Biden, US President

EXPRESS READ

SNP on course to fourth straight win in Scotland

London: Counting resumed Saturday in Scotland's parliamentary election with the governing Scottish National Party (SNP) very close to securing a majority that would see it make a push for another independence referendum. With 49 constituencies counted, the SNP had won 40 seats and is clearly on course to win its fourth straight term in office.

UK PM welcomes wins in local elections

London: UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson was enjoying an election bounce on Saturday as many of the local and by-election results went in favour of his ruling Conservative Party. The Opposition Labour Party faced a crushing by-election defeat in its traditional stronghold of Hartlepool in north-east England.

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$588.02 bn was India's forex reserve as of April 30, according to RBI data. This was an increase of $3.913 billion over the previous week

$210 mn daily output loss likely over Apr-June: S&P

More extensive restrictions would prolong the pain of worst-hit sectors

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @ New Delhi

INDIA has been hit by a huge second coronavirus wave and the government has been responding to the latest outbreak with localised lockdowns as opposed to nationwide. As such, S&P Global Ratings estimates $210 million in lost output daily in India due to the second Covid wave over April-June in a severe scenario model.

According to the rating agency, in a severe scenario, pandemic peaks late June, declines slower and mobility 40 per cent below normal, normalizes only by year-end. It added that in such a case, initial shock relays through the economy via various channels - labour markets weaker, household incomes lower, warning that the growth number for 2021-22 will be significantly influenced by GDP growth outcome for January-March 2021

In a moderate scenario, pandemic peaks end May and mobility 25 to 30 per cent below normal before recovering by September. The report said that limited vaccination coverage and exposure to more infectious Covid-19 variants may mean this infection wave peaks as late as June.

More extensive restrictions would prolong the pain of badly hit sectors, including retail and tourism. Halts to domestic air traffic and subdued international travel may dismantle the fragile recovery for airports, the report said.

"Uncertainty is very high, starting with evolution of the pandemic itself. Also, fluid relationship with household and firm behavior. Still, declining mobility may stall activity for at least one if not two quarters. Limited policy space. Downside risk to our 11 per cent growth forecast for FY-22", S&P Global Ratings said. The policy space is constrained by inflation near the top end of the Reserve Bank of India's target, it added.

Higher telcom capex key for successful 5G implementation

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @ Chennai

THE Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has given the go-ahead for telcos to begin their 5G network trials. But analysts note that many unknown variables remain to be addressed when it comes to the successful rollout of 5G — from capital expenditure required for the projects to the number of users willing to switch into higher-speed networks.

According to India Ratings and Research, "a lot of variables and unknowns need to be addressed for successful implementation". First the agency has flagged the return on capital for 5G-related investments that telcos have to make, not the least of which is the current recommended price of 5G spectrum. "The reserve prices for 5G auctions are too high. Although the 5G auctions are not yet announced, the reserve price could yield a return on capital employed of only 7 per cent," it said in a note published this week. "With the current ARPU ranging between ₹121-166/user/month, and more than 350 million subscribers still using voice only/ 2G services with significantly lower ARPU, the viability of 5G for the telcos remains to be seen," it further added.

Aside from the return on capital, the scale of investments needed are also an issue, "although the financial credit profile of Reliance Jio Infocomm Limited ('IND AAA'/ Stable), Bharti Airtel Limited (debt rated at 'IND A1+') is comfortable", it noted. Telcos, however, have already begun work on their 5G related solutions, which will only pick up pace with the 5G trial approvals.

Bandhan Bank profit falls 80% as provisions spike

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @ New Delhi

BANDHAN Bank has seen a steep 80 per cent decline in its net profit in the January-March quarter as the microfinance lender nearly doubled its provisions to cover asset quality risks. Net profit came in at ₹103 crore compared with ₹517 crore last year. The bank wrote off ₹1,929 crore of loans, a bulk of them in the microfinance segment, in the March quarter because it wanted to start the new fiscal with a clean balance sheet. As a result of the accelerated write-off, the overall provisions shot up to ₹1,594 crore from ₹827 crore in the year-ago period, directly impacting the bottomline.

According to Sunil Samdhani, chief financial officer, Bandhan Bank the performance of the last 3-6 months was assessed before taking a call on the write-offs, and it was found that most of these accounts are contact-based businesses like beauty parlour, gym, school bus owner. The bank had restructured less than ₹200 crore of advances in the year-ago period, and most of the loans which were written-off in the reporting quarter were microloans.

Bandhan Bank also restructured loans worth ₹617 crore of advances on account of the Reserve Bank of India's one time restructuring scheme. "We have only restructured home loans from our home loan book, have not restructured any loans from the microfinance portfolio," said Chandrashekhar Ghosh, MD & CEO. The bank's collection efficiency stood at 95 per cent as of March as compared with 92 per cent as of December 2020.

The gross non performing assets ratio improved to 6.8 per cent as against 7.1 per cent in December, including the proforma NPAs. Total advances rose 21 per cent to ₹87,043 crore, which included microfinance loans worth ₹58,350 crore. Mortgages as of March contributed ₹20,210 crore, up 8.8 per cent year-on-year.

2W sales recovery may stretch to festive season

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @ New Delhi

AFTER witnessing a quick recovery from the first Covid-19 wave last year, the demand for two-wheelers (2W) continues to dwindle with no sign of recovery in the coming months.

The big four players — Hero MotoCorp, Honda (HMSI), TVS and Bajaj Auto — have reported a sequential fall in demand, of over 30 per cent in April on account of a missed mini festive and marriage season, as well as with the second wave hitting the non-metros. May is set to be another month of poor sales as the majority of dealer showrooms will remain partially closed for the entire month. "As the coronavirus pandemic continues to pose a threat to lives and livelihood, our efforts in this quarter would be aimed at protecting people and their families... Due to the evolving pandemic situation, we are prepared to address any eventuality to be able to stabilise our business in the remaining months of the quarter" said Niranjan Gupta, CFO, Hero MotoCorp.

Hero, India's largest two-wheeler manufacturer, saw factory dispatches fall 37 per cent in April to 3,42,614 units. Hero has also suspended production across its plants in a staggered manner from April 22 till May 9. Gupta, however, believes that a healthy monsoon, robust harvest season and a rebound in the GDP growth should aid the industry's recovery from Q2 onwards. But, it won't be a surprise if a recovery is stretched to this year's festive season, i.e. October-November.

Analysts at Motilal Oswal said that unlike the first wave, the second wave would see limited benefit from pent-up demand. "People have lesser savings amid the second wave as a consequence of slow economic activity in FY21, minimal cash inflow from migrant relatives and high medical bills. Therefore, at the current rate of rise in Covid cases, recovery is expected to be more back-ended," Motilal Oswal said in a report.

Rising cost is another big factor that has impacted sales of two-wheelers in the recent years. OEMs have also taken a price hike of 5–8 per cent.

NEWSCOPE

VACCINE APARTHEID has to be ended quickly

GURBIR SINGH

THE international battle against Covid-19 infections and deaths just received a shot in the arm after the US administration announced it was "waiving intellectual property protection for Covid-19 vaccines." Temporarily suspending patenting of the vaccines is an important step in increasing global supply and creating a large population of inoculated people resistant to the infection.

There is a long way to go, though. US trade representative Katherine Tai, who made the announcement, warned that that it was unlikely the US decision would result in an immediate ramping up of vaccine supplies, as it needed wider consensus.

The European Union (EU) for one has opposed waiver of patenting. A German government spokeswoman said on Thursday that the "protection of intellectual property is a source of innovation" and she insisted, "the limiting factor in vaccine manufacturing is production capacity and high-quality standards, not patents." The vaccine companies — Pfizer, AstraZeneca and others — meanwhile in a joint letter written in March to Joe Biden had opposed waiver of IP cover stating it would undermine the confidence of people in vaccine safety while not boosting production in any significant way. These are expected responses from entrepreneurs in search for profits. The patent waiver proposal now moves to the WTO, and it is only if all 164 member countries adopt it, will the proposal be adopted. A single country can exercise veto, though the good news is the EU countries are now willing to discuss the proposal.

Multiply production centers

The rationale of the intellectual property rights waiver is that multiple centers of vaccine production can be started in several middle- and low-income countries. This will ramp up supply exponentially and decentralize distribution. Countries such as South Korea, Canada and Bangladesh, that have big pharma capacities, have shown keen interest in vaccine production as long as they can get patent waiver.

Currently vaccines are being manufactured in a few advanced countries, with limited licensing arrangements for the less developed world, like the AstraZeneca tie-up with Serum Institute of India (SII). Many advanced countries have shown tendencies to 'hoard' supplies rather than share it with the rest of the world. The US' stockpile of 60 million AstraZeneca shots is a case in point. These vaccines have not been certified for use in the US, nor are they being shared with Covid-19 hotspots.

The standard argument in defense of maintaining the patent system is that quality and safety of the vaccines cannot be compromised. It is a specious 'colonial' argument that looks upon the less developed countries as incapable of producing vaccines. Dozens of middle and poor nations have advanced pharma manufacturing facilities; and through transfer of technology and licensing terms the vaccine producers - AstraZeneca, Moderna, Pfizer - can ensure quality control and safety norms. Hasn't it been done by AstraZeneca in India with the Serum Institute?

Appealing for temporary suspension of IP rights, the WHO Director General Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus pointed out on 7 March that "of the 225 million vaccines administered so far, the vast majority have been in a handful of rich and vaccine producing countries, while most low- and middle-income countries watch and wait."

Debunking the theory that the poorer nations cannot produce the vaccine, he said: "Just as the yellow fever vaccine is now produced in Dakar, Senegal, an investment in manufacturing could see the same done with Covid-19 vaccines."

Not-for-profit product

Protecting patents is also the route for high returns. After pharma companies spend billions in research and testing, they want the right of way for revenue and profits. Pfizer's 'blockbuster' drug Lipitor for lowering cholesterol generated a whopping $150 billion in revenues before the patent ran out in 2011.

Imagine the returns on Covid-19 vaccines that are required in 14 billion doses annually to cover the world's population! Except this cannot be the case as Covid vaccines have been developed as part of huge government research programmes, and have soaked in massive public funds. The Moderna vaccine, which has proven efficacy, emerged directly out of a partnership between Moderna and the US' federal government funded Graham's NIH laboratory. According to the Scientific American, a team led by Dr Barney Graham, provided the essential ingredients for the development of Covid-19 vaccines. The US government also poured in an additional $10.5 billion into vaccine companies since the pandemic began to speed up research and commercial delivery.

Of the Oxford-University-AstraZeneca investment of around $11.4 billion into its widely used vaccine, government and not-for-profit funds have accounted for one-fourth or around $2.84 billion.

The very 'public' nature of the Covid vaccine therefore demands that not only should its price be controlled at affordable levels, but that it reaches everyone worldwide. In March, after three months of the vaccine being put to use, the WHO estimated about 225 million had been covered for the first dose — barely three per cent of the world population. Supply and distribution cannot be at this pace if we are to beat off a catastrophe.

So far, the COVIDmeter shows 157 million people have been infected and 3.27 million have died. This is not exactly the time to be debating patents!

GO-ONLINE

Pharma, grocery sales pick up, but Covid-19 curbs delay deliveries

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @ Bengaluru

DEMAND for pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, personal hygiene products and groceries have grown threefold in April, while fashion and consumer electronics have suffered a sales decline across e-commerce platforms on the back of lockdown-like restrictions across many states. But, the deliveries are delayed as the companies battle the twin challenge of mobility curbs and manpower shortage.

Vertical e-pharma firms such as 1mg, Pharmeasy, Practo, as well as major e-tailers including Flipkart and Amazon are seeing a surge in demand of OTC medicines, oximeters, concentrators, multivitamins at a time when the unprecedented second wave restricted movements, forcing people to rely on online deliveries. "Demand for the month of April was 20-30x more than the usual. However, supply chain constraints and shortage of medicines resulted in a 2x jump in sales of the commonly used drugs for flu or prescribed under Covid-19 home quarantine conditions," said a top executive working with an online pharma firm.

Notably, the prices of masks, sanitizers, disinfectants, PPE kits and oximeters have spiraled in the absence of any new regulation capping prices of these essential items.

Similarly, demand for groceries have also grown substantially. But, the delivery timelines on Big Basket and Grofers are now almost delayed by 4-5 days in major metros. To ease such disruptions, Grofers has set up express stores (mini fulfillment centers). "These stores, which are leased and run by local entrepreneurs, are powered by Grofers proprietary technology, thereby providing a seamless customer experience and high level of efficiency from the perspective of the local partners," the company said.

SAIL enhances daily oxygen supply limit to 1,100 MT, delivers 50,000 MT of LMO

State-owned Steel Authority of India (SAIL) has enhanced its daily limit of oxygen supply to over 1,100 metric tonne (MT). The company has so far supplied around 50,000 MT of Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO). In April, the company delivered more than 17,500 MT LMO to 15 states across the country including the states in which the plants are located. So far, a total of 14 Oxygen Express trains carrying more than 950 MT LMO have been loaded from SAIL plants at Bokaro, Rourkela and Durgapur, the company said in a statement.

Delivery of medical cargo continues uninterrupted from Kolkata Airport

Frontline warriors of the Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose International Airport, Kolkata, have been playing a key role to combat Covid-19 by facilitating seamless delivery of medical essentials. On May 5, the Kolkata Airport received 21 boxes weighing 564 kgs of Covaxin from Hyderabad and 43 boxes weighing 1,376 kgs of Covishield vaccine from Pune Airport and handed over to the Health Department. "These movements were conducted smoothly by our Covid warriors," it said.

Business & Beyond

Indian Bank donates 15 oxygen cylinders to Seth Tarachand Charitable Hospital

As a part of CSR activity, state-run Indian Bank has donated 15 jumbo oxygen cylinders to Seth Tarachand Charitable Hospital, Pune on May 7. Manish Kumar, zonal manager (Pune), of the lender handed over the cylinders to the hospital authorities. "This will help the hospital in increasing oxygenated beds and support more critical patients during this COVID crisis," the bank said in a release.

CLW produces 21 locomotives in April

Despite the spurt in new Covid-19 infections and its effect on the supply chain of raw materials and equipment, Chittaranjan Locomotive Works (CLW) has showed immense resilience. Its dedicated team manufactured 21 locomotives in the first month of the current financial year (2021-22). The 21st loco was despatched from the CLW siding. This noteworthy feat is achieved under the leadership of S.K. Kashyup, General Manager.

IOC extends Covid insurance to 3 lakh frontline workers

Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) has renewed insurance cover for petrol pump attendants and LPG delivery boys as it looked to secure its frontline workers against health emergencies. In a statement, IOC said it will also continue to provide ex-gratia assistance to the family of the deceased. The medical insurance covers the personnel along with their spouse and two children. Claims up to ₹1 lakh can be availed for expenses on hospitalisation, it added.

BALCO conducts virtual meeting on Covid-19 preparedness

Aluminium producer Bharat Aluminium Company (BALCO) has organised a virtual town hall for business partners on its Covid-19 preparedness. CEO & Director Abhijit Pati addressed over 100 partners and discussed strategies that will help fight these challenging times. BALCO has set up a 100-bedded Covid care hospital in Balconagar, Korba where at least 5,000 residents, above 45 years of age, have received Covid-19 vaccines. Pati also urged all business partners to integrate safety protocols in their working culture.

Brazil star Neymar extends PSG stay until 2025

Neymar has signed a three-year contract extension with Paris Saint-Germain, keeping the Brazil star at the club until 2025. PSG announced the deal on Saturday, posting a video of Neymar wearing a jersey with 2025 on the back and saying 'Ici c'est Paris' ' 'This is Paris', a favourite chant of the fans.

Sad day for Indian hockey

Versatile coach and Olympic gold medallist Kaushik loses battle with coronavirus

FIROZ MIRZA @Chennai

MP GANESH, the former India hockey captain and coach, was in shock. And why not? The country on Saturday lost two of its hockey stalwarts — MK Kaushik and Ravinder Pal Singh. Both were part of the Indian team that won a gold medal in the 1980 Moscow Olympics. The duo succumbed due to Covid complications.

Given his long association, Ganesh was lost for words as far as the untimely death of Kaushik was concerned. "Today we lost one of the best coaches the country has ever produced. Kaushik was very talented and down to earth. He dedicated his whole life to the sport. He not only shone as a player, but also played his part to perfection as coach of men's and women's national teams."

Kaushik had tested positive for Covid-19 on April 17 and was admitted to a nursing home in Delhi. He was 66 and is survived by his son and wife.

"He has earned everything one can think of earning. There were a few allegations against him when he was coaching the women's team but he came out clean. May he rest in peace," Ganesh added.

Former India goalkeeper Mir Ranjan Negi, who had worked in close quarters with Kaushik, was also in a state of shock. "He was chief coach while I was the coach of the India men's hockey team in the 1998 Asian Games in Bangkok. The team won the gold in that event. In fact, we went continued the partnership and coached women's team as well. I can say with surety that he was one of the few players from the country, who has dedicated his whole life for the game."

Kaushik was awarded the Arjuna Award in 1998, before being bestowed with the Dronacharya Award in 2002.

Baskaran mourns death of former teammate Ravinder

ASHOK VENUGOPAL @Chennai

FORMER India hockey player and a member of the 1980 Moscow Olympics winning team, Ravinder Pal Singh, passed away on Saturday in Lucknow due to Covid-19. He was admitted to a hospital on April 24 after returning Covid positive.

Born on September 6, 1958, Ravinder represented the country in two consecutive Olympic Games - 1980 in Moscow and 1984 in Los Angeles. India finished fifth at the 1984 Games.

Ravinder represented India in the 1979 Junior World Cup and was a member of the national team that competed in the Champions Trophy held in Karachi (1980 and 1983). He also played in the Silver Jubilee 10-Nation Cup held in Hong Kong (1983), India-Pakistan Test Series (1981) and the 1982 Asia Cup staged in Karachi.

V Baskaran, the captain of the Indian team at the Moscow Olympics, was shocked and saddened at the demise of his dear friend and former teammate. "Indian hockey has lost a very humble and down to earth hockey star from Lucknow. As a former captain, my heart goes out to his family members," said Baskaran.

The former national coach said that his friendship with Ravinder began in the late 70s. "I happen to meet him in the training camp in the year 1979 and shared a room with him. He was an excellent centre-half on astroturf. Very sound in basics, good in attack and defence. I last spoke to him in January 2021,'' said an emotional Baskaran. "In fact, me as a left-half, MM Sommaya as a right-half and Ravinder at centre combined and moved well to attack. I remember though he was my junior in the 1980 Olympics, his contribution at meetings before the games was special. Many times, he used to sing in the Olympic village and keep us engaged,'' added the president of the Chennai Hockey Association.

Ex-India defender's bid to save lives with Covid relief work

MARTIN JOSEPH @Kochi

At 30, Nirmal Chettri still has a lot of football left in him, having established himself as an accomplished footballer in the country. He has already represented India, played for some of the biggest Indian clubs and was even involved in a friendly against the Bayern Munich U-23 side where he drew praise from legendary Gerd Müller.

However, with India struggling under the second wave of Covid-19, Nirmal feels all that becomes secondary and what matters now is primarily helping people in need.

Recently, the defender organised a blood donation drive in his hometown Sikkim through his local football club FC Melli as blood banks across the country have been appealing the citizens to donate blood before getting vaccinated.

Nirmal, who runs the club, rallied their members alongside other volunteers as they collected 58 units for the blood bank at the Namchi District Hospital in South Sikkim after they were informed about a shortage of blood at the local blood bank. "Being a sportsperson and an athlete comes with a validity period. It is only for a time being and gets over one day. What matters more in life is how you can contribute to society and what kind of a human being you are. I felt I could do something and a lot of people came out in support which was encouraging," he said. In fact, this is not the first time that Nirmal has been involved in Covid-relief work.

Last year, he had organized a sanitization drive in Melli amidst the first outbreak where over 500 homes were covered. Meanwhile, the former East Bengal and Mohun Bagan player also praised the initiative work undertaken by other footballers and clubs who are using their social media handles to circulate Covid related information.

OUR IPL SPACE

The likes of Sunil Chhetri, CK Vineeth and Darren Caldeira have been very active on Twitter while a lot of ISL clubs have also been doing the same.

"I feel proud of the Indian football community because these little gestures can make a big difference. Sportspersons have a certain voice in the society and these are moments when they can put it to good effect. I'm so happy that the likes of Sunil bhai and others are doing this and coming forward," he said.

Meanwhile, FC Melli is also not able to carry out training or other football related activities, but Nirmal feels that football training is not the only aspect he wants those at the club to focus on.

FMSCI likely to decide on new calendar next month

VIVEK KRISHNAN @Chennai

THE Federation of Motor Sports Clubs of India (FMSCI) is adopting a wait-and-watch policy after the opening round of the Indian National Rally Championship (INRC) — scheduled in Chennai from April 23-25 — was indefinitely postponed. Schedules of most sports in India have been severely affected due to the second wave of Covid-19 and motorsport has been no different.

The second round of INRC in Bengaluru will have to be postponed too, considering it was slated to be held from May 28-30. With lockdowns being enforced in several cities and the number of Covid cases only expected to increase, the FMSCI is unlikely to take any call before a clearer picture emerges in June.

"There will be discussions towards the end of this month and the calendar will be revised. The situation is not very conducive right now. We will review the situation in a few weeks. Things are very volatile and the situation is changing by the day. Hopefully, the cases come down next month and we will get a clearer picture in June," FMSCI president Akbar Ebrahim told this paper on Friday.

While INRC normally consists of six rounds, the calendar was curtailed to only three rounds last season. "We are not sure whether the calendar will be condensed again. It is too early to say. There is nothing that we can predict with Covid," Ebrahim informed.

A few of the racers are suffering financially as a result of lockdowns. Seven-time national racing champion Raghul Rangaswamy, for instance, depends on a recreational karting track that he runs in Chennai for his income and has had to take a hit ever since the onset of the pandemic in March 2020. "My main business is the karting track that I run in Chennai. I own the company which manages the track. It was shut until December. It again shut down last month. Due to the lockdown, I had to put most of my savings into the karting business to keep it running," Raghul said.

Fouaad seeking letter from Indian govt to get vaccine in Germany

SWAROOP SWAMINATHAN @Chennai

FOUAAD Mirza is looking into the possibility of getting a letter from the Indian government that could enable him to get a vaccine in Germany, where he is based. The equestrian ace will travel to a meet in Poland later this month to try and meet a minimum eligibility criteria that all riders need in order to compete in Tokyo.

"Not yet," he says when asked if he has got the first dose. "We are trying to figure out how I can get around to taking it. Looking into the possibility of getting a letter from the government that we can show here to help us get on the vaccine lists." His immediate focus, though, is to meet the minimum eligibility requirement (MER) at an event in Baborowko, Poland. And he is feeling utterly confident that he will get the job done. The last time he was in Poland, he missed the chance to seal his berth. "Yes. Absolutely. Flexing biceps emoji. Smiley face emoji," was his response when asked if he was confident ahead of one of the few remaining MERs in the calendar the Indian has to successfully finish to compete in Tokyo.

He will leave from his base in Germany on either May 24 or 25. "I will leave from Germany around the 24th or 25th. The horses are in great shape," he informs. Although there are a few other back-up options (the last date to meet MER is June 24), Mirza assures, "I will be getting my MER in this event."

Even though the man from Bengaluru won India a quota by topping the South-East Asia and Oceania standings, he has to complete an MER in a CCI four-star long format. This is what he hopes to do in Poland later this month.

EXPRESS READ

Bopanna-Shapovalov lose in quarterfinals

MADRID: India's Rohan Bopanna and Denis Shapovalov of Canada fought hard before losing in three sets to German duo of Alexander Zverev and Tim Puetz in the men's doubles quarterfinals of the Madrid Open here. Bopanna and Shapovalov lost 6-4, 3-6, 10-5 against their German opponents.

Rani, six others recover from Coronavirus

NEW DELHI: Indian women's hockey captain Rani Rampal, her six teammates and two support staff members, have recovered from Covid-19 infection after spending two weeks in quarantine at the SAI's Centre in Bengaluru. The other players are Savita Punia, Sharmila Devi, Rajani, Navjot Kaur, Navneet Kaur and Sushila.

TALE OF TWO CITIES

A Covid patient receives treatment in a hospital in Ajmer. (R) A woman holds her newborn baby at Lady Elgin Hospital in Jabalpur, Saturday | PTI

Chelsea's Hakim Ziyech (L) celebrates after scoring against Man City | AFP

Chelsea stun Man City

MANCHESTER: Man City's EPL title celebrations was put on ice by Chelsea after they were beaten 2-1 by the London club. Raheem Sterling scored the opener before Hakim Ziyech scored the equaliser. Marcos Alonso scored the winner in injury time. Man City could have sealed the title with a victory on Saturday.

Leicester **2-4** Newcastle; Leeds **3-1** Spurs; Sheffield **0-2** Palace; Man City **1-2** Chelsea.

Sanjeev pauses Euro dreams, returns to join Blasters

MARTIN JOSEPH @Kochi

SANJEEV Stalin, who is considered one of the brightest prospects in Indian football, had a big decision to make recently. As the world was slowly coming under the grips of the dreaded Covid-19 pandemic, the Bengaluru boy, who represented India in the 2017 FIFA U-17 World Cup, was busy polishing his footballing skills in Portugal and trying to cut his teeth in European football. Europe is considered the holy grail of the sport and few Indians have found success outside of India.

While Sunil Chhetri had a short and forgettable nine-month stint with Portuguese side Sporting Lisbon, Gurpreet Singh Sandhu managed to feature in the Europa League for Norwegian side Stabæk. Sanjeev's European sojourn started with CD Aves in 2020 before he moved to Sertanense FC. While most of his teammates from the India U-17 side decided to sign with Indian Super League (ISL) clubs, Sanjeev had chosen the road less travelled for bigger gains in the long run.

However, as Covid-19 started to take grip, especially in India, the 20-year-old had to make a tough decision.

The young left-back pressed pause on his European dreams and boarded a flight back to India as he signed for ISL side Kerala Blasters.

"What is the most important thing in our lives? Family. Now the Covid situation is also there and during these times, I wanted to stay close to my family. For two years, I had not come back home. I wanted to be closer to my family and these were the things important for me right now. We all know the situation India is facing and I just wanted to be near them," said Sanjeev. The former Indian Arrows player went on to add that Indian football is growing with each passing year and that made it easy for him to return.

"Indian football is developing rapidly and we have a really good league in our country itself. I had offers from different clubs and I discussed all the options, but I decided to choose Blasters. It was clear that I was going to sign for Kerala Blasters because of the fans and the team," he said.

Interestingly, Sanjeev is represented by Joseph Mohan, who is also the agent of French World Cup winner and Bayern Munich defender Benjamin Pavard.

Sanjeev admitted that there will be competition for places at Blasters but he was looking forward to the challenge.

"There is competition in every sphere of life and the focus is to work hard and earn my place in the team. The goal is to achieve as much with Blasters and that means playing in AFC tournaments. For that, we'll have to win consistently and my objective is that," he said.

Currently confined to his home due to lockdown, Sanjeev is trying to maintain his fitness and be ready for next season.

SHOOTING STARS

Rifle ace Anjum looking forward to Euro tour

ANMOL GURUNG @Chennai

AFTER a period of uncertainty due to coronavirus in the country, the coast has been cleared for Olympic-bound Indian shooters to leave for Croatia. Everything they've touched has turned into gold in recent years, but there was a danger that they might miss out on much-needed polishing ahead of the mother of all events — the Olympics. Rifle ace Anjum Moudgil was forced to train at her hometown in Chandigarh, where she admitted that the sessions were far from ideal. But with the Europe trip on, the shooters have the chance to polish their skills and get into competitive mode yet again. And Anjum is looking forward to it.

"The condition (in India) right now is really not okay. My family was not happy with the idea of me travelling to Pune, Bhopal or Delhi for training. We wish to train with the whole team. I feel very safe going there (Croatia). It's (being away from home) is just a small sacrifice and this (exposure tour) is required," Anjum, who's currently with the team in Delhi, said in a media interaction organised by Sports Authority of India. The team is due to depart on May 11 and take part in European Championships and the World Cup that was announced by ISSF on Friday.

The likes of Anjum and the rest of the young shooters have raised the bar in recent years. There's healthy competition among the shooters and that has, in turn, helped them push each other and win medals on a regular basis. The TOPS athlete feels that the bonhomie that they share brings a lot of positive energy.

"Shooting is an individual sport. This culture of training together started just a few years

ago. Being with the team gives you plenty of confidence. We have games amongst ourselves, based on the number of shots... We have discussions. It builds a positive environment," Anjum, who is employed by Punjab Police, said.

Talking about the team, Elavenil Valarivan was chosen ahead of Anjum for Olympics in the 10m air rifle discipline, an event in which the latter had bagged a silver medal during the 2018 World Championships. That feat had also helped India secure a quota. Owing to Anjum's pale displays since that high and Elavenil's rise to No 1 in world rankings, NRAI was compelled to make the hard decision. Anjum has made peace with the decision and said that she has turned her focus in her pet event 50m rifle 3 positions. "Due to NRAI policy, I didn't get picked. I'm okay with the decision."

Most shooters usually bear that monastic look. Calm by nature, Anjum always tends to carry a poker face. Having learnt to keep her emotions in check over the years, she is hopeful that she can retain composure during the Olympics. "I feel the Olympics and World Championships are equally tough, but the pressure is more during the Olympics. I don't want to put pressure on myself. I just want to give my 100 per cent, do what I have been doing for the last few years. I'll just take it like any other event," the 27-year-old, who'll also be taking part in mixed event during the Olympics, said.

Pressure can bring the best in me: Rahi

SWAROOP SWAMINATHAN @Chennai

A STEAMER, a pulse oximeter, temperature gun, vitamin supplements, Ayurvedic tea bags, home-made haldi... it's fair to say that Rahi Sarnobat's luggage is a constant reminder of the Covid-19 infested world. Those are things she never carried but is taking all of them this time. Even if she herself was down with Covid just last month, she is carrying some of it if a teammate or a support staff might need it.

"I have never carried them," she says in a press conference arranged by the Sports Authority of India. "Of course I just had Covid so I hope I don't get reinfected again. But I'm carrying them because my teammate or support staff might need it." Even as a majority of Indian athletes are stuck in India still charting a course amid the pandemic, all the Olympic-bound shooters will be leaving for Croatia for a camp as well as two events (European Championships as well as an ISSF World Cup) before directly going to Tokyo. Even as Rahi, the first Indian woman to win an Asian Games gold medal, hopes she will never have to take the oximeter from her bag, her immediate attention is winning an Olympic medal. Even if an Olympic medal for most Indian athletes represents hope, it's almost an expectation for the country's elite shooters.

The why is simple. The ones going to Tokyo have set and broken world records, routinely medalled at world-level events and occupy the podium places in the world ranking charts. So there is bound to be pressure. Will Rahi, ranked No 2 in 25m pistol, feel it? Interestingly, she says some pressure is always better. "I want some pressure on me," she says. "What my experience says is that I give better performances under pressure because I really like that feeling of responsibility. The expectations don't come from people around you but it comes from athletes themselves, it can bring out the best in me."

But shooters have failed to live up to expectation in the past, the 2016 Games a case in point. But the 30-year-old makes the point that expectation is a natural byproduct of past performances. "I don't think so," she says to a question on whether she wished shooters wouldn't have so much expectations placed on them. "Expectations comes from past performances. And I want to give credit to our younger ones than the seniors because they have performed really brilliantly in all competitions."

A company that operates a major U.S. energy pipeline says it was forced to temporarily halt all pipeline operations following a cybersecurity attack. In a statement, Colonial Pipeline said the attack took place Friday and also affected some of its information technology systems.

FINAL PART OF THE SERIES

HAND OF GOOD

These organisations and volunteers are keeping our hopes alive. Here's the list of some more helpful groups

Karnataka

Sindhi Seva Samiti
The NGO has been helping in providing home-cooked meals for covid home isolation patients. This is a free service for the patients. They have started five home kitchens at Frazer town, Kumara Krupa road, Sadashivnagar, Shantinagar, Hebbal.
Bengaluru
Kumara Park : 9854005409; Sadashivnagar: 6362924880; Shantinagar : 9845546065 Hebbal: 9901511844; Frazer town : 9341289899

Care Social Foundation
They distribute medicines to both Covid-19 and non-Covid patients. They also distribute grocery kits to those in quarantine. They are running a free teleconsultation service and help those who struggle to meet their hospital bills by connecting them with donors.
Mysuru **9620984019, Abdul Khader Shahid**

Covid Support Group of Belagavi
The group supports Covid patients in collaboration with Anjuman, Belagavi and Al-Iqra, Belagavi. The group coordinates with various NGOs also. It helps any Covid patient get a bed, ventilator and oxygen. It also conducts the last rites of any Covid infected patients irrespective of religion, caste, creed
Belagavi
9845273726, 18001022716

White Doves
This non-government organisation distributes food at the Nehru maidan in Mangaluru during lockdown. As of today, the group has served over 750000 people, including the homeless, with the help of donors.
Mangaluru **9449895530**
HTTPS://INSTAGRAM.COM/WHITEDOVES MANGALORE?IGSHID=144E5CWA3SRTV

Hubballi Bicycle Club
Members of this bicycle club have been delivering medicines and essentials to the aged and vulnerable people in this pandemic.
Hubballi **9980561546**
Dharwad **9886224624**

Ettihad Foundation:
Ettihad Foundation in Dharwad helps with last rites to the victims. Its volunteers, trained by the health department, will handle Covid dead bodies in graveyards.
Dharwad **7676916237**

Yuva Brigade
The group is giving free food and to Covid-19 patients in home isolation.
Hubballi **9538341008**

Sri Suparshwanath Jain Sangh
The organisation is giving free Covid care services including food, essentials and oxygen cylinders every day.
Davangere **9448005207**

Karthik Friends Association,
The association is giving free food to Covid patients and their relatives every day. All one needs is to contact them.
Chitradurga **9986818001**

Jain Friends
In Kolar Gold Fields (KGF), Jain Friends is providing free ration to poor and food to the needy during Covid times. The volunteers of the group are providing food to attendants of patients in general hospital in KGF.
Kolar **8050555517, Pravesh**

Chandu Patil Foundation
The foundation opened a covid care center.They also provide a free ambulance service to infected people as well as provide food packets to those in the centre.
Kalaburagi **9448146111, Umesh Patil**

Sai Helping Hands
Rahul Reddy and his friends in the name of Sai Helping Hands distribute groceries in the morning. They purchase directly from farmers who are able to sell their produce.
Bangarpet **9480282000, Rahul**

KDSS
Karnataka Dalitha Samaja Sene members regularly distributing packet food to two villages regularly during the second wave. The service is helpful in the locality.
Suligunte **9945351678 Anand**

M-Friends Charitable Trust
M-Friends Charitable Trust has been distributing free meals at night to people undergoing Covid-19 treatment and their attendants at District Government Wenlock Hospital in Mangaluru for the past one year. Even now they are extending this service.
Mangaluru **9741993313**

Odisha

Amulya Jeevan Foundation Trust
Industrialist Avinash Khemka (47) through his trust, Amulya Jeevan, is providing meals to the families in home isolation in Cuttack. Apart from him and his family members, a team comprising of his firm's employees cook food.
Cuttack **9439000000**

Gurudwara Singh Sabha
Members of the Sikh community in Bhubaneswar are providing cooked food to Covid patients in home isolation. The members and volunteers started the langar seva last month.
Bhubaneswar **9668084226; 9438054641**

Angels welcome
An NGO, Angels Welfare Organization, is providing free food to the patients and the attendants at Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Post Graduate Institute of Paediatrics (Sishubhawan) in Cuttack after lockdown was imposed across Odisha on April 24.
Cuttack **9337720594**

So Am I Foundation Trust
The foundation along with FICCI, FLO, Bhubaneswar, have launched an initiative to provide free lunch and dinner to Covid patients undergoing home isolation in Cuttack and Bhubaneswar. Free food is also being delivered to the attendants of the patients.
Cuttack, Bhubaneswar
9438318880

Speak for animals
A NGO has started providing food to over 1,000 stray animals in Bhubaneswar and Cuttack.
Bhubaneswar **9777270804**

Jharkhand

Guru ka Langar
It's a group run by friends in Ranchi. They have started distributing more than 5000 food packets to isolating patients. As of now, service is available in Ranchi and Jamshedpur.
Ranchi **9431581052,**
Jamshedpur **9431300932,**

Chhattisgarh

Dhiti Welfare Foundation
Providing food, running a helpline for providing plasma, bed and oxygen. They also create awareness on vaccination
Raipur **8319019817 (Shivam Singh)**

'Samerth Charitable Trust'
They support communities through education opportunities, nature resources management and promoting livelihoods. The cadres and helpdesk arrange for blood and plasma and urge those recovered to donate. They also respond to humanitarian needs.
Raipur **8770924100 (Palash)**

'We The People'
A youth-based organisation with around 300 volunteers, provides temporary shelters, coordinates movement of labour, does public awareness drives, food distribution and support district administration. It also raises funds to provide medical devices to those in need.
Raipur **7000085425**

Delhi

Youth Welfare Association
The south Delhi-based NGO supplies home-cooked meals to Covid infected patients or their family members free of cost. The service is available in select south Delhi neighbourhoods such as Kalkaji, Greater Kailash Part 1, Greater Kailash Part 2, Lajpat Nagar, East of Kailash, Kailash Colony, Jangpura Extension, South Extension, Green Park, Sant Nagar, and Kailash Hills. At present, the association is serving 103 families. To book meals send a message to Raghav Pal Mandal.
New Delhi **9810377022 (ONLY WHATSAPP)**

Delhi Sikh Gurudwara Management Committee
(DSGMC) runs 'Langar' or free food people especially for Covid 19 patients including their families and elderly persons, who are facing crisis due to the pandemic. The service is available across the city. Food is prepared and packed at different gurudwaras from where it is distributed to the needy.
New Delhi **93109 41095**

Assam

Bator Ghar Feeding Group
A group that takes of strays dogs thrice a week in Sivasagar town. They pool in money to buy meat and rice and take turns to prepare the food at their home. In all, about 40 dogs benefit.
Sivasagar
9101114221, Abhijit Duarah

Shree Marwari Nattya Samity
The group provides vegetarian meals to Covid-19 patients in home isolation thrice a day. They have to register through an app. After registration, members will be added to a WhatsApp group where they are updated on the timings of delivery.
Guwahati
94350-30303, Kailash Bagaria

Maharashtra

A tiffin service started by a group of friends for people in isolation. Will be delivered free of cost. This service was started by Rajeev Singhal after realising a lack of options when he was down with Covid earlier on.
Mumbai **9821012287, 9820061086, 9920160669**

West Bengal

Manmatha Roy Oxygen Quarantined Student
It's a network of some 5,000 members, who have been working to help people in distress in Kolkata and adjoining districts. Other than helping to get beds and oxygen, volunteers provide medicine, home-cooked food, pulse oximeters and sanitisers for those who are unable to come out of their homes. They also help in supplying vegetables, groceries
Kolkata **9163003100**

J&K

SRO Kashmir
Provides oxygen concentrators, oxygen cylinders, ambulance services, burial services and doctors consultation to Covid-infected patients in the city.
Srinagar **18001022146**

Athrout
Provides oxygen concentrators, ambulance services and even medicines, Covid kits including PPEs, face shields, sanitisers and masks.
Srinagar **9796946968**

Ehsaas Trust International
Providing oxygen concentrators, 24x7 tele doctors consultation of different specialisation from within J&K and abroad and food kits.
Srinagar **18008892729**

Help Foundation
Providing oxygen concentrators, neubulizers, oximeters, lmedicines, ambulance services and food packets.
Srinagar **9018454529**
ABABEEL 9906005525

OTHER HELPFUL ORGANISATIONS
KASHMIR WELFARE TRUST
7006815550

HELP POOR VOLUNTARY TRUST
6006497253

CHINAR INTERNATIONAL
9797150777

Rajasthan

Jai Shri Aggarwal Samaj Samiti and Shri Agrawal Samaj Trust
They are providing free accommodation and food to the families of Covid patients. It's in Agrawal College Campus Hostel, Agra Road and Jaipur Road
Jaipur **8385092747**

Sindhi Central Panchayat
The organisation is providing free accommodation and food facilities to affected families at Pratap Nagar Kumbha Marg Sector 17 Sagar Bhavan.
Jaipur **9785354151, 9828078401**

All India Jangid Samaj
It has issued a helpline number to provide medicines as well as accommodation to infected persons and their families at the community building in Vidyadhar Nagar.
Jaipur **9414042779, 9829846217**

Mars helicopter heard humming in thin air

SPACE

CAPE CANAVERAL (US): First came the amazing pictures, then the video. Now NASA is sharing sounds of its little helicopter humming through the thin Martian air.

NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in California released this first-ever audio Friday, just before Ingenuity made its fifth test flight, a short one-way trip to a new airfield.

During the fourth flight a week earlier, the low hum from the helicopter blades spinning at more than 2,500 revolutions per minute is barely audible. It almost sounds like a low-pitched, faraway mosquito or other flying insect.

That's because the 4-pound (1.8-kilogram) helicopter was more than 260 feet (80 meters) from the microphone on the Perseverance rover. The rumbling wind gusts also obscured the chopper's sound.

Scientists isolated the sound of the whirring blades and magnified it, making it easier to hear. Ingenuity ' the first powered aircraft to fly at another planet ' arrived at Mars on Feb. 18, clinging to Perseverance's belly. Its first flight was April 19; NASA named the takeoff and landing area Wright Brothers Field in honor of Wilbur and Orrville, who made the world's first airplane flights in 1903. A stamp-size piece of wing fabric from the original Wright Flyer is aboard Ingenuity.

The USD 85 million tech demo was supposed to end a few days ago, but NASA extended the mission by at least a month to get more flying time.

For Friday afternoon's 108-second test flight, the helicopter traveled southward in the same direction the rover is heading. Once over its new airfield, the chopper soared to twice its previous altitude ' 33 feet (10 meters) ' took pictures, then landed. The two airfields are 423 feet (129 meters) apart. With the helicopter's first phase complete, the rover can now start hunting for rocks that might contain signs of past microscopic life. Core samples will be collected for eventual return to Earth.

BLACK AND WHITE
Zebras are pictured in their enclosure at the Kuwait Zoo on Friday | AFP

Neanderthals in Italian cave?

ARCHEOLOGY

ROME: The fossil remains of nine Neanderthal men have been found in a cave in Italy, the culture ministry announced Saturday, a major discovery in the study of our ancient cousins.

All the individuals found in the Guattari Cave in San Felice Circeo, located on the coast between Rome and Naples, are believed to be adults, although one might have been a youth.

Eight of them date to between 50,000 and 68,000 years ago, while the oldest could be 90,000 or 100,000 years old, the ministry said in a statement.

"Together with two others found in the past on the site, they bring the total number of individuals present in the Guattari Cave to 11, confirming it as one of the most significant sites in the world for the history of Neanderthal man," the ministry said. Culture Minister Dario Franceschini hailed the find as "an extraordinary discovery which the whole world will be talking about".

Francesco Di Mario, who led the excavation project, said it represented a Neanderthal population that would have been quite large in the area.

Local director of anthropology Mario Rubini said the discovery will shed "important light on the history of the peopling of Italy".

"Neanderthal man is a fundamental stage in human evolution, representing the apex of a species and the first human society," he said. The findings follow new research begun in October 2019 into the Guattari Cave.

Warehouse rule for air quality in California

ENVIRONMENT

LOS ANGELES: Southern California air quality regulators on Friday approved a rule that would curb diesel emissions from thousands of trucks that ferry goods from the growing number of massive warehouses in the region run by Amazon and other companies.

Areas around the facilities have weathered increased pollution affecting their largely minority communities. The so-called warehouse rule was approved 9-4 by the South Coast Air Quality Management District board.

It institutes a points-based system requiring about 3,000 distribution centers to choose from a menu of options to reduce or offset emissions. Those could include choices such as replacing diesel trucks and other equipment with electric models, putting in rooftop solar panels or installing air filters at nearby schools or day care centers.

"Warehouse operators could prepare and implement a custom plan specific to their site, or they could pay a mitigation fee," the proposal read. The fees would go toward funding similar air quality improvements in surrounding neighborhoods.

South Coast district officials said they acted in order to meet federal smog-reduction deadlines in 2023 and 2031. The Air Quality Management District said in a socioeconomic impact assessment report earlier this year that the regulations would provide public health benefits worth $2.7 billion from 2022 to 2031 ' including 5,800 fewer asthma attacks and 300 fewer deaths.

Environmental and activist groups praised the vote, saying it will reduce pollution while providing local clean energy jobs.

The rule 'is the first step in eliminating toxic emissions from one of the nation's largest and most profitable industries," said a joint statement from the Sierra Club, Earthjustice, People's Collective for Environmental Justice and the Partnership for Working Families.'Squinting through the smog, California is charting a better future for the sake of our lungs, " said Adrian Martinez of Earthjustice. 'The health benefits will be immense, but the Indirect Source Rule is just the beginning.'

NATURAL INSTINCT

Rio 3: Last wild macaw is lonely and looking for love

ENVIRONMENT

RIO DE JANEIRO: Some have claimed she's indulging a forbidden romance. More likely, loneliness compels her to seek company at Rio de Janeiro's zoo. Either way, a blue-and-yellow macaw that zookeepers named Juliet is believed to be the only wild bird of its kind left in the Brazilian city where the birds once flew far and wide.

Almost every morning for the last two decades, Juliet has appeared. She swoops onto the zoo enclosure where macaws are kept and, through its fence, engages in grooming behaviour that looks like conjugal canoodling. Sometimes she just sits, relishing the presence of others. She is quieter ' shier? more coy? ' than her squawking chums.

Blue-and-yellow macaws live to be about 35 years old and Juliet ' no spring chicken ' should have found a lifelong mate years ago, according to Neiva Guedes, president of the Hyacinth Macaw Institute, an environmental group. But Juliet hasn't coupled, built a nest or had chicks, so at most she's 'still just dating.'

'They're social birds, and that means they don't like to live alone, whether in nature or captivity. They need company,' said Guedes, who also coordinates a project that researches macaws in urban settings. Juliet 'very probably feels lonely, and for that reason goes to the enclosure to communicate and interact.' Aside from Juliet, the last sighting of a blue-and-yellow macaw flying free in Rio was in 1818 by an Austrian naturalist, according to Marcelo Rheingantz, a biologist at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, and there are no other types of macaws in the city.

The lovebirds featured in the 2011 film 'Rio? are Spix's macaws, which are native to a different region of Brazil and possibly extinct in the wild.

Being boisterous with brilliant plumage helps macaws find each other in dense forest, but also makes them easier targets for hunters and animal traffickers. They're often seen in other Brazilian states and across the Amazon, and it is suspected Juliet escaped from captivity.

Biologists at BioParque aren't sure if Juliet's nuzzling is limited to one caged Romeo, or a few of them. They're not even certain Juliet is female; macaw gender is near impossible to determine by sight, and requires either genetic testing of feathers or blood, or examination of the gonads.

Either would be interference merely to satisfy human curiosity with no scientific end, biologist Angelita Capobianco said inside the enclosure. Nor would they consider confining Juliet, who often soars overhead and appears well-nourished.

'We don't want to project human feelings. I look at the animal, and see an animal at ease,' Capobianco said, noting Juliet has never exhibited behavior to indicate disturbance, such as insistently pecking at the fence. 'Who am I to decide it should only stay here? I won't. It comes and goes, and its feathers are beautiful.' Last year, BioParque g ave its macaws more space: a 10,700-square-foot aviary.